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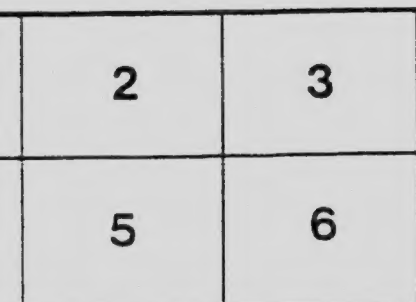
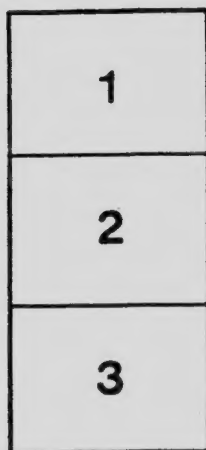
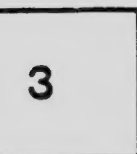
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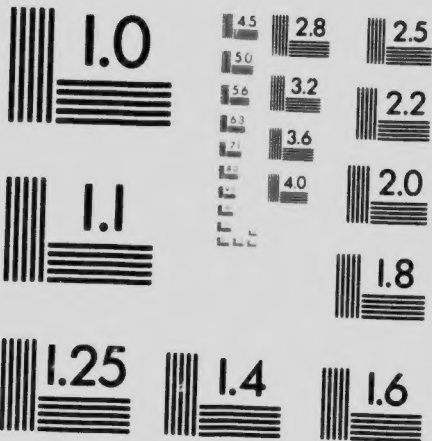
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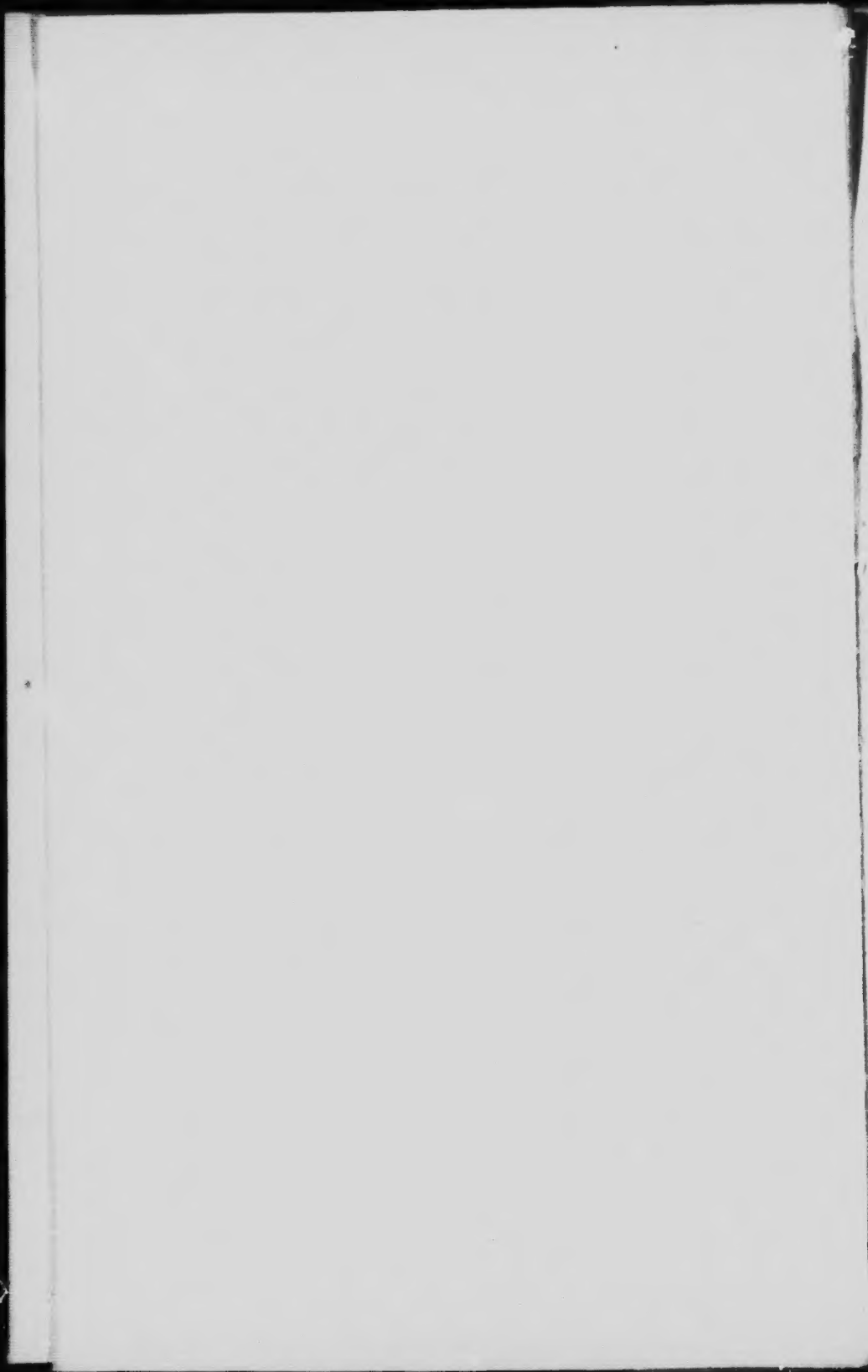
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The Land of Memory

BY

LAUCHLAN MACLEAN WATT

AUTHOR OF

'THE TRYST,' 'IN PORT'S CORNER,' 'THE GREY MOTHER'
'THE HEART OF A SOLDIER,' ETC.

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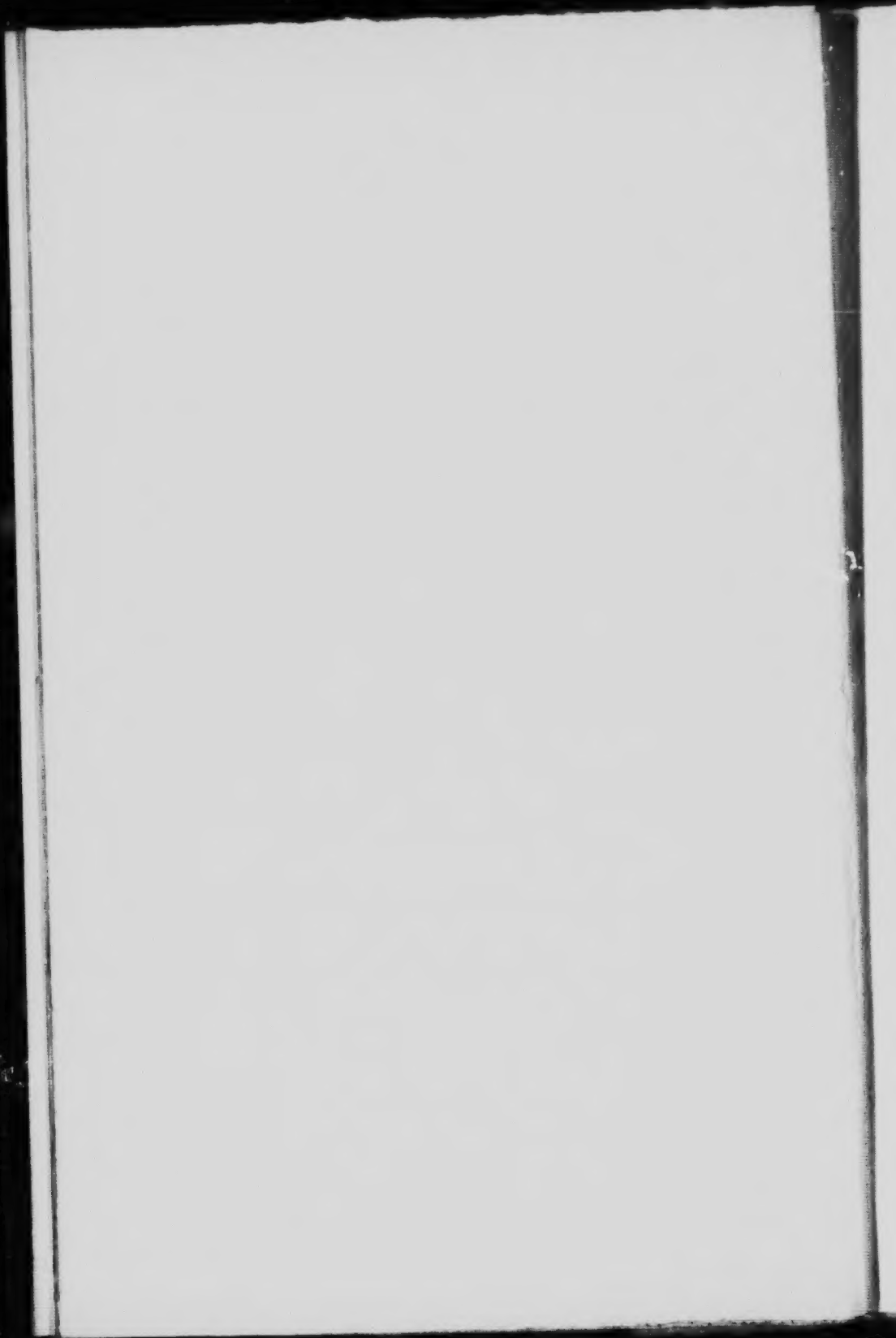
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TO THOSE I LOVE
AND ALL WHO LIVE
IN
THE LAND OF MEMORY

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- III. THE
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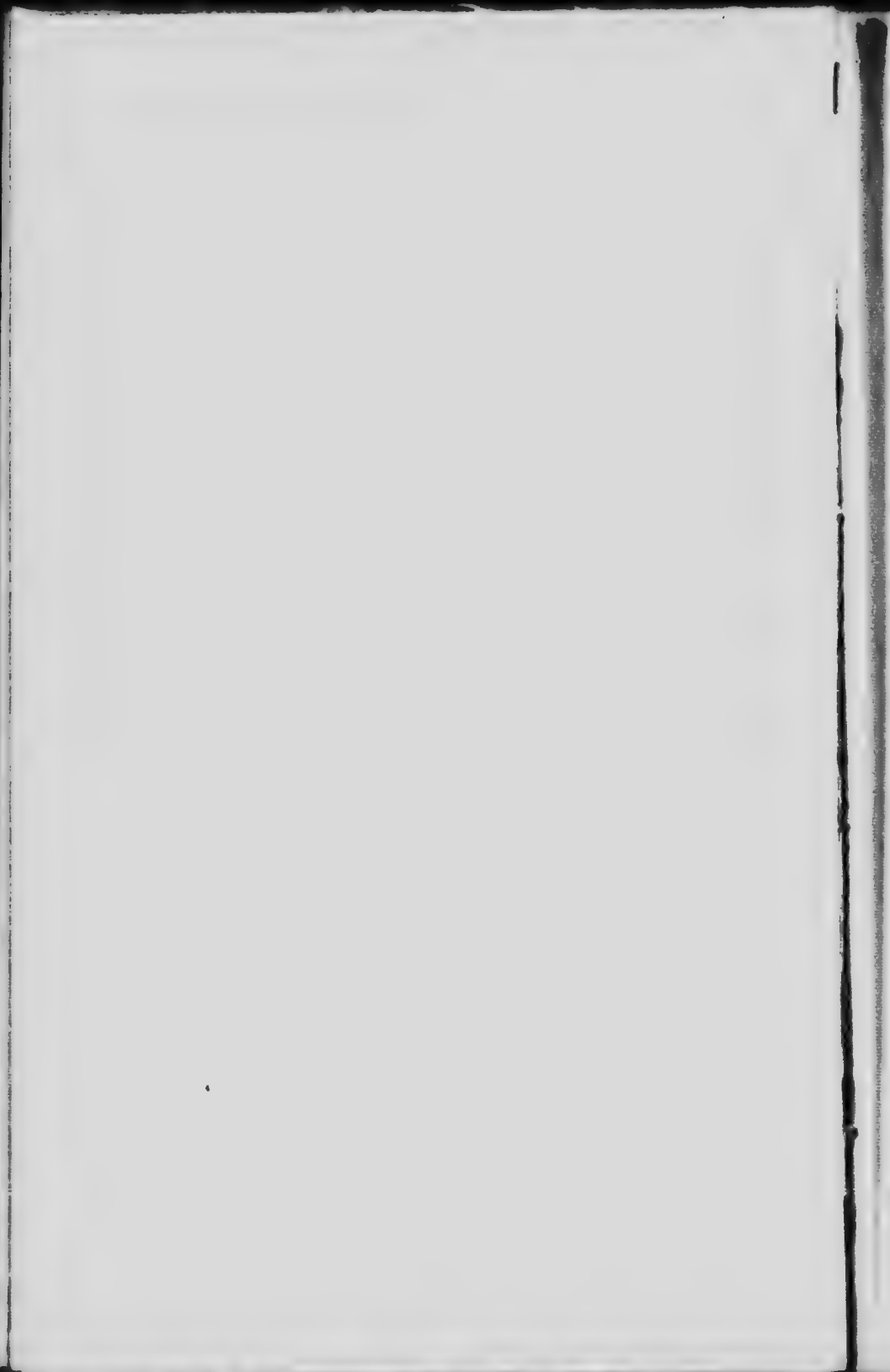
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In September 1907 the late Stopford Brooke wrote me :

'Everyone writes about Nature now. Why do they not write about men and women, and the eternal natural and noble passions of humanity? The poets who used Nature as the background for human life were in the right way.'

This explains somewhat of the purport and significance of the following poems.



Memory

WHEN all the town is still, and on the street
Only some midnight outcast wanders by,
My soul goes out by winding ways of dream,
Forth-faring through the Land of Memory.

'Tis long since gentle Memory was my friend,—
Most dear of friends,—and ever happy, crowned
With fairest flowers of meadow and of wild,
Violets all dewy from the mossy glade,
Daisies and azure bells from field and brake,
And, on great days, with laurel on her brow . . .
But now 'tis rue she wears ; and her great days
Come, frequent, with a shadow on her face.
Cypress she carries, as for sacrifice,
And where, in time gone by, she sang her songs,
Now silently she moves about my heart,
Her shining eyes charged with a silence vast
Of tears unshed, which never dares she weep
Lest she should weep for ever, comfortless,
And I, with her, even in the sun, should grieve.
And yet I love her, for she brings to me

Touch of dear hands that once have clasped my
hand,
And bright brave faces that have looked their last
In mine, and sought the shadows without fear ;
And young folks' laughter, and the morning light,
And evening glories flung o'er land and sea,
And hours of tenderest meaning, when the day
Was gently shaded lest mine eyes should ache,
And night was filled with softly shining peace,
Lest in the dark my very heart should break
Over the unreturning.

I have known
Joy like the gladness of the laughing seas ;
My heart has been as fitful as the wind
That sets the wild flowers dancing in the glade,
And breaks the waves to rainbows in the sun.
Yet has it looked in the deep heart of pain,
And seen Death's shadow quench Youth's splendid
fires ;
And marched beside the brave, who, past the cloud
And storm of war, when woe broke through our
world,
Dwell with the true who fell for Liberty.

In the grim trenches, where the silence seemed
Louder than sound, or where the sleepless guns
Like an Atlantic's surging filled the heavens

And shook the earth with thunder of dismay,
Where Death and Life were jostling side by side
In the long narrow lane that runs athwart
All human dreamings and all mortal joys,
I've seen the faces darken into grey,
And heard the footsteps die, returning not,
Through days of ache, and nights of hungry prayer;
And earth can never seem again to me
The thing it was, nor life itself so poor
In promise and in portent. And I turn,
Kindling again the flame upon my hearth,
Stirring again remembrance in my breast,
Looking again, through Sorrow's closing doors,
To fields of Hope Death cannot snatch from Love.
And, while I linger, tender as a dream,
Sweet as forgotten song that reawakes
In depths behind my heart, comes Memory,
And leads me forward to my answered prayers.

Love has been with us in the days long dead.
Love is beside us in our daily path,
And Love shall clothe us, when the robber Death
Has stripped us naked of our dusty rags,
When we have shaken off Hate's nightmare clutch,
And Sorrow sleeps in her forgotten grave.

The Schoolhouse

ALL places where the joys or griefs of men
Have lived their pageantry, grow humanized
With tenderness,—as homes of gentlest Thought
That, like a ghost, moves through their shadowy
rooms.

The schoolhouse on the hill—with weed-grown
thatch,
And little windows, dim as though the breath
Of those who gazed thereout still dulled the pane,—
Stands by the roadway. Touched now with a smile
When the glad sunshine like a morning tide
Floods all the land—anon it broods in mist,
With the deep Western melancholy rain
Ever adrip from wide-projecting eaves
Like sound of heavy weeping in the mirk.
A derelict of happy Yesterdays,—
Yet once 'twas all athrob with busy life
Of warm-faced boys and girls whose restless feet
Were brown as peat-born streams among the moss,
Whose gladsome hearts were mirthful as the larks
Soaring with pulsing wings of heavenward song.
They knew each trail across the stretching moors

Left by the running creatures of the wild,
Each nest watched fearfully by feathered care,
Each pool where solemn brown trout lay and
dreamed

Through the long drowse of summer afternoons.

The giens were poor; the food was oft-times
scant;

Houses wind-swept, and drenched with constant
dews;

And empty benches told the frequent tale
Of sickness when Atlantic blasts were wild,
Searching their way through chinks of ill-built walls;
So the old master wrote the record down,
Of struggle, in his book,—it moves us still,
Like a refrain of iterated song,
Or wail of bells through fog and spindrift blown,—
'No school to-day, for storm that swept our isle.'

The home itself was not immune from pain;
The master anxious, with uncertain fears,
Tracing his doleful lines with trembling hand;
Till with sad weeping eyes he entered there:
'No school to-day. Last night my dear wife died.'

Oft in the little room, forsaken now,
I've dreamed I heard the sad steps overhead,
And felt I'd love to lay my pitying hand
On his bowed shoulder, lonely as he sat,

With heart that ached for her whose comradeship
Meant more than tongue could utter, to his soul.

There, in the desert of the rain-beat nights,
He never lifted head or heart again.
All gladness dried within him like a spring
Whose source by sudden earthquake throe is spilt.
He could not face the echoing empty room
In whose dark corners desolation dwelt,
Where, to his own voice speaking, none replied.

The children's games fell silent when he moved,
A solemn shadow, o'er their playing ground,
Returning daily from the sweet green knoll
Behind the schoolhouse, whence he might behold
The little graveyard, lying swathed in sleep.
In the old garden-plot the sparse flowers drooped.
The grey house shrank as folded round with fear;
And one day he returned not to his place,
Writing no more his words of simple pain
Through which still speaks his poignant weariness.

It was a jovial man that took his place,—
Lithe, keen, with sparkling eyes and merry heart,
And small black fiddle, which at night he pressed
Beneath his bearded chin, where it became
A thing of speech, and song, and wailing wild.
'Twas his familiar. Whoso lingered near,
Heark'ning beside the doorway, felt their feet

To rhythmic motion stirred by impulse strange
Of leaping tunes with quaintest mirthfulness.
There, in the night, when the lone place was dark,
And all lay slumbrous, waiting till the dawn,
Only his window in the gabled wall
Glimmered and leered, like mischief-twinkling eye,
That seemed to ope and shut, as the wind's mad
breath

Fitfully made his candle flicker and flare.

There you might hear him if you chanced to pass,
Playing away, at midnight, by himself,
Things like the laughter of another world.

Once, late, a serious elder, grave and stern,
A solemn man, dry-hearted, wondering heard
The unhallowed shrieking of tormented strings,—
Resolved to warn him 'gainst his soul's mischance,
Lifted the latch and slowly stepped within.
Up the steep stumbling stairs the rollicking rant
Guided his heavy feet towards the gleam
Of dancing light beneath the ill-fitting door.
He knocked, but got no answer save the laugh
And shriek of wild strathspey and hurrying reel.
So, thrusting wide the door, he entered in,
And saw, through eyes of horror, form most quaint,
With tassel'd night-cap on his nodding head,
Sitting among the blankets, rapt in dream,

Playing the merriest strains ear ever heard,
On godless fiddle, mirthfully, alone !

The grey-faced man of God rebukingly
Coughed, but the minstrel heard or heeded not.
Next, clumsily he scraped the naked floor,—
But never heed the busy minstrel gave.
So forward in the flickering light he leaned,
And with stern voice of cold remonstrance said :
' Now, do you think that this is proper work
For one who guides the hearts of innocence ? '—
Yet never a blink the merry eyelids made.

In holiest deep disgust the elder turned,
Groping his way into the night again,
Nigh falling down the narrow stair in haste
Lest the roof crashed in judgment on his head ;
While the black fiddle, from the master's room,
Sent shrieking mockeries of mad laughter down,
And out behind him, flying o'er the heath,
Beating his ears as with fierce buffetings
Of fiendish wings, in pitiless close pursuit !

Alack ! the tale of every day's neglect,
And awe-struck whispers of his midnight sport,
Brought Judgment Day swift-footed o'er the moors ;
So, from the old house, by the highway-side,
The small black fiddle underneath his coat,
He followed Fortune through the wider world.

And yet the gable room seemed piteous dark
When he had left it empty of his mirth !

Folded about with trees it stands alone,
One broad-leaved plane more sacred than the rest,
For that the last chief set the seedling there.
So for the old name's sake 'tis precious still,
Holding, even through to-day, that glamour'd charm
Which neither gold can buy nor kings bestow,—
Bringing into these cold commercial hours
The beat of oars from galleys on the sea,
The tramp of brave men going forth to fight,
Led by red gleams of glory and romance ;
Ay, more than once, the laughter, tuned to tears,
Of men whose grief sees broad lands pass away
Out of their race and name for evermore.
The solemn tree stands loftier than the walls,
Its rustling foliage shutting out the sun,
Making a shimmering gloaming, soft and dim,
In upper rooms. Sometimes its branches beat
Upon the window, like an outcast's hand,
Tapping by night its weird telegraphy.

The children far are scattered, once so glad,
Helping in sunny croft-lands of their folk
To gather in the hay-crop or the corn.
Yet still you trace the signs of busy play,—
Houses of make-believe, in heathery dells,

Their doorsteps mapped with pebbles from the
stream.

There, in the sunshine, were they wont to move,
Swaggering short petticoats over sunburnt calves,
Playing at courtly ladies making calls,
Small caricatures of what they'd seen and heard
At shooting-lodge, or manse, or village church.
How grave the golden curls o'er young care swayed
As tenderly the mother slowly rocked
A twig of heather tied in tartan shawl,
Crooning low dirges to a suffering child !
The home-spun skirt was rich as dreamland silk,
The peat-stained kilts as trim as courtly clothes
In stateliest halls beyond the narrow seas !

Past the grey gable-end, a winding track
Was worn by frequent goings to and fro
Of those who carried water from the well,
The wage a cooling draught for carrying it,—
Through the green patch, and over a dyke of turf,
And down a slippery brae o'er which the path
Stumbled and fell to edge of a silent pool,
Whence the stream gurgles, tinkling through the
moss.

It ripples in the open for a while,
Then coyly dips away, deep out of sight,
Humming and sobbing, croodling to itself,

Under the grass
To hide it, as
Draw their skirts
A little shy on
Mingle conflicts

In the still night
You hear the c
Like elfin music

THE SCHOOLHOUSE

11

the grassy banks that lean across
le it, as a band of laughing girls
their skirts close together, so to screen
e shy one, in whose blushing cheeks
e conflicting modesty and fear !
he still night, beside the schoolhouse door,
ear the croon and gurgle far around,
elfin music, trembling 'neath the stars !

The World of Faerie

I SEE again the gentle close of day :
The shadow of quiet eve falls o'er the world.
The voice of childhood calls across the years !

Soft as the shadow of a loving hand
Passed tenderly above a weary face
Lest the light dazzle, shot athwart the room,
When the long level sunbeams flash good-bye,—
So, over hill and sea sweet gloaming trails
Her pensive shadows ; and the sun's farewell
Tips the far cloud with dying gleams of gold.

The children's voices falter in their game,—
'How many miles to Babylon?' A call
Some champion whispered, stricken in the fight,
With dripping red wounds, dying through the dark.
'How many miles to Babylon?' Alas !
'Three score and ten !' the answer,—far beyond
His clinging strength that scarce knows how to cling,—
Old strains that rang along the ballad lines
Of time-worn minstrels, who, at castle gates,
Or through the hour of banquet in the hall
Sang of love's sorrows and the olden years !

Now o'er the young hearts night begins to weave
Her magic glamour, and their voices droop
Through the song's rhythm a-drowsing, till their feet

Trip in the mesh of sleep ; and petulant words
Sunder the ranks of play. Their tongues forget
The weary miles to Babylon, their tired hearts
Longing for shortest roads to Slumberland.
Then the fond mother calls the children home
To supper, and to bed ; upon her knee
Helping her struggling babes in their last fight
With the strong ogre who delights to tease
Innocence, wearied, sealing up sweet eyes
Against the sun, with shadow and with dust,—
Sleep, that will make a man forget his love,
Watching beside the very bed of death,
Until his heart, outworn, can keep no more
Its wakeful ward against the king of dread.
It takes the bravest captain in the field ;
It swathes the sentry in forgetfulness,
And through his dream the foemen find the breach
Unguarded, prayers and vigils all in vain.

With kisses sweet the mother exiles tears—
Dispels the clouds with charms of ancient song,
Low fairy lullabies, and slumbrous croons,
Yearning laments of maidens, lorn and sad,
From starlit moors, or fields of golden corn,
Snatched, for some monarch's love, in elfin land ;
Till Sleep, the old and wise one, age-long wise,
Takes the young brain in craftful mastery.

Then with quiet faces friendly neighbours come ;
And old-time tales of warlock and of witch,
Hill-folk, and sea-folk, flood their souls with fear,
Till the long tracks across the misty moor
Get full of haunting shapes which dog the hearts
Returning homewards through the ghostly gloom.

For still, by green burnsidcs, and in the glades,
And up the glens that pierce the solemn hills,
All through the dark the little people dance,
With laughter like the ring of silver bells
To the strange piping of another world.
Dawn sees their footprints in the verdant sward,
And in the wind-stirred heather, ankle-deep,
The mazy traces of their dancing steps,
Led by the glamoured music's witching spell.

There, in the moonlight, by the mossy stone,
Familiar faces, long since lost to love,
Mingle with faces of the fairy band ;
And voices which once shared the laugh and song
By cottage firesides, in the wintry eve,
Join in the jingling laughter and the rune,
With strangest longings beating through their mirth.

There, could the mother wait, her hungering gaze
Might see her child, who seeks her yet in dreams,
Kissing her lips, betwixt the night and morn ;
There the fond lover, swathed in constant grief,

Might view the lost beloved who holds his heart
Through the years unreturning, her bright eyes
Flooded with wistful yearning, 'neath the moon.
There the lone student, lingering in his dream,
Hears, through the mist, the chime of bridle chains ;
The gloom is cleft, and golden helm and shield
Are touched by light that this world never knew.
Brave voices that rang out on fields afar,
Flinging their challenge in death's frowning face,
Upon the night-wind rise and die away !
In brooding thought outside the fairy ring
True Thomas holds communion with the shades,
Thinking of his grey tower beside the stream,
For ever desolate, with the whistling wind
Wailing alone through its forsaken rooms.
Kings who from battle had been borne away,
Untarnished by the touch of conquering death,—
Queens, whom the pity of a world unseen
Drew out of sorrow's bondage and distress
Into the ageless realm where love retains
Sweetness and gladness past Time's tears and scars,—
These, the soul, quickened, views at midnight's hour,
Strange mist-clad shadows, moving through the
glades.

Not all men had the secret ; yet to some,
Gifted by fairy mystery to perceive,

'Twas given to hear, and see, and understand.
In the quiet gloaming, when the world lay still,
These, dreaming not of fairy land or lore,
Seeking the cattle, wandering far away
From beaten tracks and common haunts of men,
Their feet, unthinking, touched the fairy ring,
And lo ! the silence rang with elfin song,
Their startled eyes saw merry crowds in green,
Circling their magic mazes till the morn !

Or where, beneath the grey cloud-mantled skies,
The wan sea beat his grief upon the stones,—
Or where, within the gloom of tide-worn caves,
Filled with the shivering sob along the sand
Of the long waves, that, from the misty deep
Bring their desire, and perish with a sigh,—
The sad sea-people, banished out of heaven,
And shut from earth, all soulless and forlorn,
Lie prone for sorrow, or their sea-green hair
Shake out into the moonlight, emerald beads
Of gleaming spray, like jewels, shining there.

A moving world, for ever, to and fro,
With joy or sorrow, for the souls that see ;
Yet oftenest sadness. Even when day is nigh,
In the weird stillness of dim shores forlorn
The mermaid combs her locks, and sings her song ;
And the lone sailor, far upon the waves,

Hearkening, knows 'tis his own dirge she sings.
Or the weird washer spreads her blood-stained robes
On sea-swept rock, or where the mountain burn
Gurgles and throbs its journey to the sea,
Singing the while a lay that chills the blood ;
And he that hears or sees knows death is nigh
To those he loves, within the glen asleep.

And often love's sweet passion caught the heart
Of fair sea maiden for some earthly swain.

Down by the shore they show the mermaid's cave,
Lonely and strange,—a world made in a dream.
And on the arch above the moaning wave's
Soft molten music moving to the moon,
The red stain, unobliterate through the years,
Deep in the stone imbued, still marks the place,
Where in her frenzy of forsakenness
She dashed herself, and bled her life away.

Eyes look upon you, though you see them not ;
And in the solitude, remote and still,
You feel sad presences ; and, by the strand,
A movement as though feet invisible
Had shifted in their place.

'Twas thus men read
The inner heart of things ; and, as they dreamed,
All sounds of Nature found responsive chords
Within the listeners' breasts. And as they heard

So did they see. The river in the gorge
Shouted mad laughter underneath the crags,
Because its journey led it through despairs,
By places where grim doom had done his task
In caverned haunts and dead men's tragedies.
The wind that cried at midnight through the strath
Was weird and awful, for that, on it borne,
Shades of the dead went by. Did not one rise
From his quiet fireside once, throw wide the door,
And, as on mighty wings that beat the dark,
The great host of men's spirits, doomed to die,
Swept past in long procession, and himself,
Last of the shadowy band, he here beheld;
And came back to his fireside, told the tale,
Then sat him down, and yielded up his ghost?

So, too, the brook that chuckled through the fern,
Crooning soft songs as on its way it pressed
Seeking the sea that called it up the glens,—
How, in the dusk, it crept beneath the banks,
Hushing its song for fear, yet in the sun,
Or through the starlight, warbled on once more,
Knowing that laughing elves went by its side,
Dancing in company onward to the deep!
So earth got peopled with a mystic folk;
And the wide world was thus interpreted,
Clothed with strange meanings and significance.

Gormuil

'Twas quiet enough, where Duncan built his
house,

Save when the wind blew wildly from the West,
Driving the foam-tipped tide with angry cry
Across the level machair, in the dark.

But when the silent moonlight softly stole
Like silvery gossamer, o'er the waves asleep,
And blue-eyed Gormuil looked abroad, and felt
Glamoured ghost-music filling earth and air ;
Then would she shut the eerie night without,
And kneel down close above the smouldering peat,
And dream her dream of beauty and of hope.
And she would croodle o'er the slumbering babe,
Wondering if on her lips, or in her heart,
The words were whispered, ' Colin, little love,
Rocked by the angels in the shell of dreams,
Shall aught divide us ever, through the years ? '

Ah, how the swift time sped, as sped the tides,
Racing beyond the skerries in the deep,
The way which knows not the returning foot !
And joys went forth from Gormuil, to be lost
And all forgotten as the light of stars

That faded from the skies of Yesterday,
Till Duncan lay down sick, to rise no more.
Then they out-bore him, Gormuil crushed with
grief,

While black winds shrieked about the storm-lashed
shores,

Whirling the leaves into his shallow bed
As though they grudged the low lair dug for him.

Then Night became a thing of shadowy shapes,
Of flickering phantoms whispering fears to her.
Oft would she stand beside the open door,
And watch the white foam steal along the verge
Of that forsaken world ; her heart would hear
Weird voiceless music moving in the void
Above the lone wan waters, while the lad,
Whose life pressed on to hopes that ran before,
Lay sleeping in the mirk without a dream.

Up through a stillness, vast beyond our ken,
Yet filled with shining things of poesy,
Climbed her child's growing mind, 'mid quiet days.
He was her world, possessed her every thought ;
And Gormuil never laid her down to rest
Without a last long lingering glance abroad,
To guess if on the morrow 'twould be well
For Colin's bare feet running to the school
Where the old soldier taught the Gaelic psalms.

Few came near to her cottage ; and her grief
Sank like a curtain, shutting off her life,
In reaches more remote as years passed by.

Out in the wide world nations were at war ;
And a great cry went wandering through the glens
For that old Highland fire which made men's souls
Glow in the strife, when other blood froze cold.

The exiled chief, come to his own again,
Sent forth the call ; and, with a keen response,
More than a thousand true hearts rallied round
The ancient banner, to their fathers dear,
To follow where its fluttering folds should lead.

Then Gormuil's boy, straight, handsome as a
birch
That grows above the singing waterfalls,
Heard of the marshallings which had stirred the
straths,—

And, with no kiss of good-bye for the lips
Which had so prayed for him in days of old,
He joined the marching crowd whose goal was set
Far past the line of the environing hills.

'Tis written deep on history's glowing page
What waited for that band of valiant men.
They crossed the seas ; but sickness smote their ship,
Their chief, and all their best, like children died,
Never to lie 'neath the familiar shade

Of the tall mountains of their native land,
In slumber, through the silence of the glens,
Till God's great trumpet summon them to rise.
In the vast azure's deep oblivious dusk
Their bones are drifting till earth's final hour ;
And, of the thousand who had left their homes
Brave with the scent of battle, a meagre band,
Fevered and trembling, reached the distant shore.

The unrecording years crept wearily,
Still wearing out that sad one's lonely life ;
But ever, last thing when the darkening came,
And first when gladsome morning shone abroad,
She oped the door and looked across the heath,
With gaze that hungered for she knew not what ;
And never, even when the moon shone bright,
Untended was the lamp whose steady flame
Burned in her little window till the dawn.

Gormuil, the blue-eyed, dim of vision grew,
Years came to her not as to other folk,—
But, like strange guests who carry not away
Unwelcome gifts when in the morn they go,
They left behind them anguish, cares, regrets,
Whose constant burden daily bowed her down.
And so time faded, till one day she rose
Aching, and in her breast the old refrain
Of hope that lingered like a broken song.

Unruffled o'er the moorland lay the snow,
Death's beautiful pure stillness. Winter laid
His white hand on the pale face of the world.
She oped the door as she through years was wont,
But her tired heart stopped, sudden-smit with awe,
For lo ! like spectral answer to her prayer,
Silent, all swathed in snow-flakes, there he stood,—
No light of recognition in his eye,
Gaunt, hungered, in his regimental rags,
Bonnetless, shoeless, haggard, and forlorn,
Her own son Colin for whose face she yearned.
'Praise God !' she whispered in her breaking grief,
Then stepped aside, and wider flung the door.

The ghost man entered, sat beside the fire,
A bit of shivering silence, while with haste
She brought some food which ravenously he ate,
Then prostrate flung him down upon the hearth,
And with one plunge his soul sank into sleep.

No word of meaning from those lips fast-sealed,
Broke through the long sad, heavy-footed years.

When weeping mists hung low, or winds were wild,
And the white hissing rain swept o'er the world,
They'd see the tall grey figure, straight and stern,
With scant hair waving in the boisterous breeze,
Shouting, against the loud voice of the storm,
Words of command, called forth by some mad spell

Out of remembrance, as if dimly heard
In tumbling battle, ere his reason crashed
To utter ruin and forgetfulness.

And, when the sun was sinking, and the land
And water swooning in the summer's heat,
They'd see mad Colin, on the lonely moor,
Chasing his shadow, running at its heels,
Not with loud laughter, or in sportive play,
But like a bushman tracking close his foe,
In deadliest silence of unbroken hate,
Till on some sunny bank he'd fling him down,
Clutching, to lose it all in grasping it!

Then o'er the machair he would send a wail,
A cry that had within it soul deep pain,
Till at his feet he'd see his enemy,
And vain pursuit and sorrow be renewed.

There's just a green mound down beside the sea,
Which marks where Gormuil's cottage walls once
stood.

The nettles crowd where warm the red fire glowed,
Where oft, in darkness, she had knelt and prayed,—
As though they were the fruitage of her tears.

Up in the graveyard, where the rude stones
mark

The slumber place of dust once dearly loved,
These two are sleeping till Christ wakens them.

But some remember still the tales they heard,—
How Gormuil every morning oped the door
For the grey grief that came at last to her;
And Colin chased his shadow in the sun;
And many another tale, with tears in it,
Of quiet Highland places whence, to-day,
Still go the young hearts flocking after hope,
Till soon shall none remain of the ancient race
Except the lone dead lying in their graves.

The Dead Hand

How oft to-day we boast our liberty ;
And yet we cannot shake out thought and deed
Free from the grasp of those who lie asleep.

Sure seldom was a forger or a thief
Thwarting the solemn purpose of the dead,
But conscience, quaking, heard steps on the floor,
Quick breathings of the unseen beside his ear,
And his hot fingers, snatching at the crime,
Felt clay-cold contact of the dead man's hand
Send shivering tremors through his shuddering heart !

Yet oft with promptings of a purpose kind
The dead man's hand keeps warm, even through
the years.

One quiet grave asleep within the glen
Speaks so to me that I can scarce recall
Its message but a swimming haze obscures
Mine eyes with tears, remembering its sweet thought.

The glen lies low on threshold of the hills,—
Great hills, behind whose wall the sun retires,
Like weary worker glad to seek his home,
Shutting up doors and windows after him,
His hard toil finished, and his long day done.

When the deep shadows lengthen through the
land,

And the slow dragging year draws near its close,
Along the hilltops Winter grimly moves,
A reconnoitring foe ; or sits for weeks,
His white cloak round him, staring at the plains ;
Then, patience torn aside with sudden wrath,
He storms about the cold and cowering world,
Sealing the doors, disturbing sleeping farms,
Shaking the thatch above the cotters' beds.
Till in the swing of sure revolving time
The spear-tipped armies of King Frost depart,
The snows dissolve like a November dream,
Though still old sentinel Winter, in the hills,
Scowls on the mountain tops, while in the plain
Sweet Spring sings songs to the awakening flowers.

There are few dwellings,—just a scattered group,
A straw-roofed hamlet nestled 'neath the shade
Of one green knoll, on which the ruined church
Stands, 'mid the graveyard, far from din and noise—
A haunt of ancient slumber near the wells
Of vast unchanging quiet, remote and still.
About it close the solemn trees are ranged,
As though each leaf were listening, motionless,
Spell-bound by voices of the vast Beyond.

Within the ruined belfry the old bell,

Once wont to ring the sleeping hamlet home,
How many generations none can say,
Nestles among the ivy, idle now.

Ah ! many a day its voice had stirred the glen !
Winds from the mountains, rude as reaving bands,
Had shook it till it cried aloud its fear.
In winter nights they closed its mouth with snow ;
In spring, when mists were blown about the hills,
And all the streams ran wild above the banks,
They whirled the rain about it till bright drops
Hung from its rim like tears. The old folk said
It came from some sweet island of the West,
Blessed by Saint Colum, who had touched its
tongue

And given its voice a tone of prayerfulness
With comfort for the sad in silent rooms,
Feeling the flood-tide deepen, lifting slow
The keel that bore their loved ones far away
Out of the shallows to the Eternal Sea.
And many a fisher, kneeling in his skiff,
Let his net drift the while he prayed to heaven
In very joy of heart, to hear the chime,
That bore the old saint's blessing wide and far,
Float out in mellow music o'er the wave.

That blessing girt it. For, one weary day,
So ran the tale, along the channels came,

On the swift tide that runs among the isles,
The long ship of the pirates,—blue-eyed men,
With laughter of wild warfare on their lips.
Seawards they'd heard the sweet bell's call to prayer,
And, in their grim hearts, hate of God's white Christ
Leapt up with mocking wrath ; for they knew naught
But scorn for singing nun and droning monk
Seeking for peace in heavenward paths of prayer.
They leapt ashore. The ravens' battle-cry
Rang through the isle ; they steeped in blood their
spears,

Set the roof blazing, left the altar red,
And to their long ship bore the holy bell.

But the saint's blessing chased them o'er the deep.
Through the mirk midnight, moonless, void of stars,
A roaring wind, with awful voice of wrath,
Hunted and dogged their ship about the seas.
Men in the mountain hovels, waked by fear,
Heard the bell clang along the lanes of storm ;
And when the morning dawned, and day fell clear
Across the shining stretch of golden sands,
A long ship's prow the gusts had broke in twain,
With two dead Northmen, whose bright yellow hair
Death's hue had dabbled red, lay on the shore ;
And, high above the line of moaning waves,
Secure among the tangle, flung afar,

The bell the saint had blessed, which through the
dark

Had fought its way back to the home it knew !

How first it reached the glen, by what hands
borne,

Prayerfully from the West, no man could tell ;

Yet to each cotter precious was the tale,

How the dead hand that blessed could guard its own.

Only the tailor doubted ; but in this

His unbelief was scorned. Himself had come

Like driftwood hurled before a wintry blast,

A stranger to the glen, one morning found

Beside the smithy ashes wrapt in sleep,

A weary draggled waif ; and he had stayed,

For there was work about the kitchen fires ;

And the great crowded world beyond the hills

Perchance had faces in it whose rebuke

He never had one wish to see again.

There now the old bell hangs, but messageless ;

It rings in worshippers to church no more ;

For derelict of prayer the grey place stands,

Roofless and bare to wandering winds and stars.

The dead have quietly crept within its walls

For peace and shelter from the crowded graves,—

A laird first, then his wife ; a farmer next,

And all his sons and daughters, until now

It holds as large a host of sleeping folk
As ever in the olden days it held
When pews sat nodding to the parson's drone
In sweet forgotten summers long ago.

Yet one grey man, whose voice, grown thin and
faint,

Seemed speaking from the verge of vanished years
Chill with the frosty winter of his age,—
An old man bowed and bent, with chin on breast,
As though stern Time had gripped him 'twixt its
hands,

Crushing him close, to carry him away
In easy compass, more compact, at last,—
Told how, a child, he sat beneath its roof.
Skulls of dead folk had rolled into the church,
(So said the ancient) for the weeds and leaves
And growing mould of dying seasons, heaped,
Had raised the grassy level of the graves
Above the earthen floor of the crumbling place.
These grim memorials of our mortal state
Lay grouped in nooks of seldom opened pews,
In window niches, and behind the doors ;
For in that glen, where the still hours themselves
Seemed ever half-asleep, even leisure was
Too busy drowsing, for its work undone.
So, said the old man, he and other boys

Kept themselves wide awake, despite the prayers,
Passing along the pew from hand to hand
Some mouldering symbol of mortality,
When the stern eyes of mother or of sire
Were sealed in slumber deep, and could not
frown !

Sometimes, at night, the cotter from his door
Hears a strange tinkle, even when winds are still,
And fear, with chill feet, creeps about his heart ;
For well he knows whose dead hand rings the bell,
Though yet no mortal eye has dared to view
The eldritch figure in that belfry crouched,
Nor looked upon the gibbering ring of ghosts
Whom his wild jangle, breaking on their sleep,
Calls from their graves, in that forsaken place !

His name is long forgot, as though men feared
Even to think about it, as time passed,
Till very silence shrank it on its stalk.
Now all they know is that he loved his books,
Wearying his brain through many a midnight hour.
A student and a scholar, richly dowered
With all the wisdom of the learned world,
Yet like a man by some great sorrow chased,
He came, a spectre, wild-eyed, o'er the hills.
Still at his heel gaunt madness followed close ;

Till in his loneliness his soul grew stark,
And in the dawn some, fieldward faring, found
Him hanging limp and dead, with staring face,
From the bell-rope at gable of the kirk.
His corpse, self-slain, and the dread cord accurst,
They buried, in a darksome place apart,
Where the green nettles in a shuddering crowd
Grow thick together. But, when night is deep,
The old bell tinkles, as it must have mourned
When that soul, desolate, grappling on to death,
Jangled it o'er the graves, until he hung
Silent and still and dead. And Fear declares,
In winter, in the unlighted starless dark,
He rises from his nettle-mantled bed,
And climbs among the ivy to the bell,
Stirring its silent tongue to hideous voice,
Like hellish laughter, with the poor dead hand
That did the grisly deed, amid the gloom,
When his soul flamed to madness long ago.

And yet quite nigh there is a lowly grave
On which the last soft sunbeam loves to rest,
Where kindly dust is sleeping, whose dead hand
Holds gentlest love throughout all fickle time—
The aged pastor, to the poorest dear,
So tenderly they think and speak of him
As though he died but yesterday ; and lo

His dust has slept beneath the changing flowers
In that green slumber-plot a hundred years !

He had seen sorrow. At his hearth it sat,
Till intimate close friends they two became.
His bride, the daughter of an ancient line,
Died in her prime. And then his eldest boy,
Thoughtful and wise, through clever youth-time
grew,

Till, in the seat of learning far away,
Honours and praise grew clustering round his
name.

Then came he back, and lingered all the year,
Through autumn changes fading with the leaves.

One lad was left, from whose sweet shining face
Looked the deep eyes of her who lay asleep.

Lo ! like a thunder-bolt of portent dread,
The sorrow beyond sorrow crushed his life,—
Sudden demented in the home he fell,

A jabbering idiot, inarticulate,
To live through grief-dark summers, till, one morn,
He looked up in his father's face and smiled.

Sweet reason flickered there, and then, alas !
The kiss of infinite slumber sealed his lips

The old man gripped faith closer to his heart,
Although it pierced him sorely like a spear.
He moved amongst his people tenderly,

Weaving invisible chains of deathless love
Round all their lives until he passed away.

And then, for sake of the sweet love he bore
To that 'ear child in whose poor shattered clay
His hope had perished, men found when he died
How the dead hand, so stainless and so pure,
Had blessed the glen, most precious to his soul.
The lonely, and the aged, and the poor,
These he remembered for all coming years ;
But, more than all—from out his goods he left
What should endow and help a studious boy,
Feed him and clothe him, pay great learning's fee ;
And from the grave his very dead dust yearned
To bless the scholar with immediate touch.
For, whoso might be pastor o'er that flock
Must, on the day when men remembered Christ,
Beneath the shadow of the old grey kirk
Meet with the lad, and hand him, with a prayer,
The dead man's gift across the dead man's grave.

And if, perchance, the struggling youth should die,
Then must they bring the out-worn body home
To those who loved him, and the glen he loved,
And bury him there beside his kith and kin,
That at the last awakening he might rise
Amongst known faces and remembered names.

I mind me how my friend, a poor man's son,

Thus touched the kindly hand from out the tomb
Outstretched in benediction, as of old,
Through all the years above that quiet place.

So, in the glen, 'tis each heart's fondest dream
To live so kindly that even death shall leave
Not pain, but loving grace, and hearts unknown
Find blessing fall thus from a dead man's hand!

Left far behind, with much for ever lost,
These drop into the void,—a new world calls.
A new home waits the coming of my feet!

The Manse

A GREY house in my Land of Memory—
It stands in stately quiet 'mid whispering trees
Which day and night make slumbrous melody.
Now hum of wandering bee, now wild birds' song,
Anon a sigh, as of some distant tide
Beating for ever on moonlit shores afar,
Moves through the boughs with solemn witchery.

The vagrant breezes, singing songs of rest,
Dwell in the branches ; yet, in northern nights,
When winds are stirred to rage against the stars,
And the wan moon, like storm-blown galley, drifts
Through the white wonder of a wintry sky,
The crumbling belfry moves in its deep drowse
Above forgotten folk of long ago ;
And unseen fingers wake the bell to speech,
As summoning them to some weird worship there,
While, lapped in toil-won dreams, the village sleeps.

The old home seems to hearken, as 'twas wont,
When voices, silenced, called the house to prayer
Up through the lamplit shadows, ere to rest
Retiring, to lie down on the lap of God.
Then, suddenly, the clock upon the stairs

Seems to say 'Amen,' softly, under breath,
Ere it move on again, accompanying Time
In his incessant route-march round the world.

It loves the shadows best, for it has known
Unnumbered things of shadow, things of pain,
That frequent in its gladness gave it pause,
Telling it of the ache and irk of men.

'Twas but as yesterday, seen through a dream,
When up the lane, to measured tuck of drum,
Came the long line of marshalled men of arms,
Dusty with tiresome travel. At their head
Rode he who ravished many a northern glen,
Leaving the wail of widows and the cry
Of children fatherless behind his tracks—
Cumberland, on his way to that wide moor
Where the brave clans were scattered, and the hopes
Of that romantic line, to clansmen dear,
Tost to the winds. Here, in the field now filled
With gardened cottages, they flung them down,
Summoned the white-haired lady of the house,
Compelling her, whose sons were gone afar
Among the plaided men, to bring them food
With her own hands, before they filed away,
Their drum-beat dying along the river road,
Towards Culloden's direful field of doom.

Outside the limit of the lichened wall

Stretches the highway, where the traffic runs
Through dusty summers ; or through russet leaves,
When dusky Autumn, dark with sunny tan,
His rustling carpet spreads ; or through the drift
Of winter snows, or when the tingling air
Trembles with bells, as spectral sleighs go by.

There, in warm sunshine, blue-eyed scholars pass,
Grave, in the morning, to the school-house door,
Conning their tasks, with mien supremely wise ;
Or when the frosty fingers of the morn,
In later seasons, pinch them as they creep,
Early, reluctant, blowing their mittened hands
Into a thaw ; the snow, beneath their tread,
Crunching, they go, a grudge in their young hearts.
There, when the day bends on to afternoon,
Return, with laughter, all the noisy band—
Brief the road then, forgotten learning's care,—
Leaping and singing, glad for liberty.
Through the half-open gate they coyly peep,
With mirthful fear, a-tiptoe, crowding round ;
Hushed, if a footfall on the gravel move,
Then, with a shout, away like startled deer.

When evening folds her spell about the world,
Come herd-boys driving sleek warm cattle home,
The violet shadows of the twilight hour
Following behind them till the hills grow dark,

Long darts of sunshine flashing a quiet good-night.

Tall and stately it stands, a living thing,
Not a mere monument of mortal toil
In stone and timber ; it has outlived more
Than is remembered by the dying days,
With their weak generations seeking rest.

Two hundred years of passing feet have worn
Its doorstep hollow. Many a joy has leapt
In over the threshold, many a grief crept forth,
And many a pain, asleep for evermore,
Been carried out to its low slumber-place.

Here, on the grassy lawn, the children played
In sunny hours long dead, their innocence
With laughter overflowing, as a stream
Joyously flashes love and peace and light
For souls a-weary in a weary place.
Hither, aloft on lumbering harvest wains,
Down leafy lanes the rosy children came ;
Here, in dark winter, when the frosty skies,
Keen with the wide-eyed stars, kept scrutiny,
They gathered round the lamp, and conned the page
Of learned rhyme and rote, in wisdom's quest ;
Till manhood claimed them, and the world beyond
Called them away, to wander o'er the seas,
Or in grey towns to labour, or to lie,

Life's warfare spent, awaiting God's wide dawn
In narrow places, amongst alien folk.

They all had passed, the thoughtful ones of old,
Who pondered here, pacing the grassy walks
Beneath the trees, and of their ponderings spoke
To the quiet people, reverent, in the pews,
When I, a child of a far later day,
Came thither,—saw the old house in the shade,
Walked where their pensive feet had worn a track,
And on the silent threshold touched my dream.

The door thrown open, with expectant air
The dim hall waited me. Up through the gloom,
A thing of memory, rose the winding steps
Of the forsaken stairway. Silence pressed
Forward to greet me. Doors moved overhead
As though hands stirred them; and the oak floors
 creaked

As though beneath the tread of weary ghosts
Who there, long dwelling, crowded to the rails,
Leaned over, gazing down with wondering eyes
To see what shadow of To-day could dare
Disturb those shadows of dead Yesterdays.

How haunted was this house of Memories!
In every room life's drama had been played,
Love had known laughter, Gladness learned of
 tears,

Faith doubted, Doubt believed, Life linked with
Death,

And both gone outward to the great Beyond,
Seeking God's secret, somewhere past the stars.

Yet not in namelessness forgotten quite ;
For some men spoke of,—solemn, still, and proud,
Who stooped to common sorrows, and forgot
In darkened rooms all stateliness and pride
Except the pride of service for His sake
Who gave their love its noblest stateliness.
Not words did men remember,—ages since,
Blown on the winds of long forgetfulness,
Dogma and doctrine in oblivion lay ;
But the great preaching of sweet kindly deeds,
The blest theology of gentle hands
Whose benediction-touch had cooled the brows
Of tossing pain in hamlets of the poor.

Of one who carried Christ's love in his heart—
Ashes and dust long since—they often spake,
Gravely and tenderly as though his name
Were syllabled with pathos of a prayer.
'We love him, for he loved us,'—they would say.
Oft, in the night, when all save Sorrow slept,
He watched till Pain fell sleeping. In the morn
The early worker, peeping through his blind
To gauge the weather ere he passed a-field,

Would see him, in the glimmer of the dawn,
Wearily wending homewards to his rest.
At length the Shadow all men flee before
Stole through the doors, and sat beside the fires,
Till women pined, and strong men bowed and
died ;
But still he moved amongst them, fearing nought.
The dying blest him ; his name was the last
Spoken on earth, remembered first in heaven.
Then the dread plague, whose terrors he defied,
O'ertook him in the dark, and silently
Mounted and rode, till in the ford he fell ;
And there they found him, as a man in sleep,
Out of a heavy toiling, glad for rest.

Now, where the ivy creeps along the wall,
His kind dust lies till Time shall overpass ;
But Love, that still remembers how he loved,
Keeps the green moss from deepening o'er his
name.

So, in the chambers of that House of Dream
My life began to fare upon its way,
Through quiet hours of thought, through toil and
prayer,
Following in faith the footsteps gone before,
Groping through joy and sorrow, pain and peace,

If haply I might see the Morning Star
At length break forth above my pilgrim path.

'Tis far away, yet ever, as I move,
My heart remembers; and the old place speaks
Across the rain and shine of long dead years,
Helping to keep me faithful, till the end.

The Tryst of Faith

ORT in the night, when sleep enshrouds my world,
And feather-footed dreams move through my heart,
I see the winding river, fold on fold,
Threading its path of silver to the sea.
The flickering candles glimmer in the panes,
Lighting the cotters to the close of day,
Ere they shut fast its door with the latch of prayer.

Where this grey city's travail scarce knows peace,
We hear no pleading voices through the dark
Beseeching from the ready hand of heaven
To-morrow's strength ere this day's weakness pass,
With half its duties tangled, incomplete.

O God, whate'er Thou art, be pity-crowned.
Come, clothed in mercy, knowing how weak we be,—
How passion's breath blows out the light we leave
Too much in draughty places of our world ;
And we go onward, groping in the gloom,
Too deeply bent on trivial things of clay
To lift our leaden eyes and see Thy stars.
If, in our crowded stress of passionate words,
We miss the whisper of Thy still small voice,
Speak to our souls in dreams, that we may hear

The word they heard of old, who knew, and loved,
And left their all when He said, 'Follow Me.'

I hear the waters lapping in the lake
About the keel, storm-tost ; and am afraid,
Often, as they were, lest my bark go down,
And in the blue deep all my promise die.
Yet ope mine eyes and let me see, as they,
Him the nails wounded, sleeping on the thwart,
Until I wake Him with my frenzied cry—
'Lord save me, or I perish!' Save my soul
From craven dreads, from mean pursuits that draw
My spirit breathless out of duty's path,
Lest, while I run, Time carry me past heaven ;
And, where I hoped to hear Thy welcome voice,
I hear but clanging doors ; and Thy 'Too late !'
Ring o'er me, dazed and lonely in the dark.

How still they sleep who were so true to Thee,
Treading their path of sorrow, led by pain—
Strong souls whom faith made stronger than their
day.

'It is His will !' they said, when, as they toiled,
Death called them, from their doorways, to return
And lie down patient, stretching out their hands
For Him to lead them who so often led
Their fellows, eager-hearted, everywhere.

I do remember how their brave lives taught

My life its gospel,—not by hardened creeds,
Once living things, now as in flinty rock
Embedded by the fossilizing years,—
As when one splits asunder slabs of stone
And finds strange footprints, through long ages hid
From human gaze ; and feels, ' Lo ! here was life.
In days now faded into the great Perhaps
Here boldly stepped across the plastic clay
Something that throbbed with purpose and with
dream,

Now gone for ever. Thus our living days,
To dead days' needs enslaved, go limpingly
Into the day of God, whose golden light
Has broadened, deepening past our trivial thought.'

Not so the souls who heard God in the winds,
And on the hillsides, where, behind the plough,
In frost and rain they helped Him make the world,
Turning to quickening suns the fertile glebe
Where sleeps the portent of rich Autumn's gold,
With song of reapers when the harvest moon
Broods broad and low above the rustling sheaves.
Between their world and His swung folding doors
Through which the power that lights the morning star
Came, 'twixt the twilight and the dawn, with peace.
They saw God's purpose ripening in the loam,
And every furrow led them nearer heaven.

So all the year ; yet deepest when the day
Of Christ's remembrance fell across their hearts,
And the warm flood of sacramental love
Rose to the fulness of an ocean's tide ;
Then the best men and women sat possessed,
Now shook by grief, anon made strong with prayer,
Seeing through pulsing moments, thought and deed,
Purpose and will, set up for measurement
Against the Cross that stood on Calvary's height.
They hungered for the bread of life,—their souls
Thirsted to quaff the chalice of His love.
So, in the quiet church, or 'mong the dead,
Out where the loved lie sleeping, or beside
The unsleeping sea's reverberant melody,
They heard God's pain shook forth in thunder-
storm,

Or His deep pleading love for His lost sons
Like breath of summer evening, charged with tears,
As of an angel's weeping ; while the psalm
Rose on the air, soft quavering as of old,
When in Columba's days it floated out
Afar to sea, and made wild boatmen stay
Their oars, off lone Iona, long ago.

Behind the hills men swept their hearts for God.
From far away came sons and daughters home—
Some that the years had sundered o'er the tides,—

To speak with Christ within that holy house,
Deep-hushed with recollection's tenderest dreams.
Thither, when ruddy youth with eager glow
Lit faces, grey now, scored with countless scars
Drawn by the ploughshare of the passing years,
They had been carried for the sacred rite,
When the strong hands, now trembling, held them up
Before the font, for the blessed grace of Christ.
How, in the darksome places far remote,
In crowded town, in desert, on the seas,
In holds of ships along whose plunging keels
The lonely wave awoke its desolate croon,
Had love moved with them wheresoe'er they moved !

Strong men remember, till death snaps the chord
Of clinging memory, that deep solemn hour,
When through the open door the moving quiet
Of the old graveyard crept, as though the dead
Themselves were listening there, and wondering why
No white-robed angel with the trump of God
Shook death's firm gates apart, and summoned them,
The quick and dead, in one, to meet the Lord,
At His own table, in His feast of love.

Sometimes to share the grace of the Upper
Room

Only a handful sit, and with their plaids
They muffle up their faces, for they fear

Christ in His sacrament, lest in His bread
They break a curse, being all imperfect still!

Then the old psalm of Christ's sweet shepherding,
Beside still waters, and where fields are fair,
And o'er the darkness of the long Divide,
Till in God's house our dwelling-place shall be,
Awakes the sleeping magic of that hour.
The listening hearts lose hold of Time and Space,—
Darkness and death are naught. They hear His
voice,

'Lo, I am with you always!' And His hand
Touches their hands around His loving cup,
Which lips of generations long since dust
Have touched as though they kissed the very hem
Of Christ's own garment in Gethsemane.

Dear souls beloved, in long forgotten graves,
The kirkyard grasses growing from your hearts,—
How near He came to you, as you stretched forth
Your hands for those dim shimmering things that held
The symbol in them of a Saviour's blood!

They spoke to us of days when, not as now
In quiet pews and under times secure,
But on the desert moors and lone hillsides,
Stern men sat silent, grim death looking on
Out of the dark clouds pierced by the curlews'
scream,—

Those cups of compact, passed from hand to hand,
Upheld the friendless outcast for His sake.

Still keep we tryst with Him ; our sacrament,
Our soldiers' oath to serve Him, still we take ;
And so He holds His hand beneath our heart,
Steadying its beat to music of His own.

Oft have I hearkened, feeling Him so near,—
Expectant of His step on threshold stone,
Listening to hear His finger on the latch,
To feel soft helpful palms about my brow,
And see the Man of Sorrows looking down
Upon my tears, through sorrows of His own.

O keep me watchful, lest He come again
And find me sleeping, ere my task be done !

Love's Witness

HIGH up above the village stands the kirk,
Of plain grey stone, as though from off the moor
Ingathered for upbuilding by strong hands
Of stalwart men who feared the face of God,
And knew no other fear until they died.

A house of whispering memories and of prayer,
Yet long the shelter of a faith that seemed
To outward question joyless and afraid,
Whose shadow was the ever-haunting dread
Lest 'mong God's mercies we should be forgot,
Destined to darkness, far away from love,
Though all the world besides were doomed to light.
For, 'Whom He chose'—so spake some long ago—
'He gave to gladness, whatso they achieved,
What evil star they followed, or what pain
They wrought upon the hearts of fellow men.
What you believe, not what you live, is all.
Deeds are but chaff; load up your ship with creeds,
Then through the shallows strike for the great vast
sea.'

And yet men's souls felt often stirred to learn
'The worth of one warm act for love's sweet sake,

Outshining countless clouds of wind-blown words,
And Ignorance crawling through the night of Faith.

Week in week out the drowsing people heard,
Unhearing, through their slumber in the pews,
Dogmas they neither loved nor understood ;
And seldom looked upon their pastor's face,
Save when he came to stir them in their dreams
O'er faith's high questions, smouldering and obscure.

Into the farmer's kitchen then they crept,
Coyly, like children coming for rebuke,—
The hind, the milk-maid, ploughmen and their boys,
Trembling lest, stumbling o'er long words, or tripped
In wide-spread noose of doctrine, they might fall
Helpless, forsaken, into the pit of hell ;
Or wondering if the grim-eyed man of God
Had heard the farm-yard rumour of their sins,—
How Jock kissed Jenny on a summer's night,
Intoxicate with love of her dear face ;
Or in the market, in an hour of joy,
Forgot himself in rare convivial mood,
Sat singing choruses until the hour
For closing doors and loud good-byes drew near,
Then, in the dark, within the clammiest ditch,
Upon the homeward journey slept till morn ;
Or how, when weary of the tiresome flail,
The bailie brought Will orders, to the byre,

That well might wait until to-morrow's tide,
 He banned him to his fate, and bade him go
 Tell the mean man they served they were not slaves,
 But men,—and how a man is still a man
 Although his strength he barter for a fee;
 With other things and thoughts that bring the blood
 Up to his forehead as he now recalls
 The wild vocabulary of his lurid rage.

Not then, as now, a mighty gulf, unbridged
 By loving tender thought, stretched out between
 The farmer and his hinds. Then, linking all
 Into one family, rich and poor in one,
 Lifting the low, yet lowering not the high,
 The same board fed them, and the hour of eve
 Found them the same before the most high God,
 Kneeling in prayer, the soul's true brotherhood;
 So learning, for each other love's great task—
 To share and bear love's load through life's grey
 day.

Love oft-times thrust aside the narrow creed,
 Saying, 'My child, lo! here a heart in pain,—
 A woman, in the wilderness, alone,
 Broken by passion. Do not pass her by
 Lest, in the twilight, when thyself is sore,
 Comes One whose palms were once herod, and thy
 soul

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not His pity plead, remembering
hardness in another's day of grief.
speaking, Love broke down the Self-built wall
ironing the elect, who, hard-faced, sought
force their way through gate of very heaven
loss the grief and want of God's lost babes.
Love laid a hand upon the forward breast,—
not a little, till the Master see
nameless who have wandered,—till He hear
His voice calling, weary from the wilds!
who say "Lord! Lord!" but those who

ding to which desert flints have pierced,—
quiet, unheeded, who, with the lamp
lowliest service, gather from the dark
fallen child for whom the Master's wounds
ed, 'mong the angels, in heaven's splendid day!
h, how the growing heart beat of the true,
Pity's pendulum the world swing,
ared in the gathered sand under way;
d men began to follow, in life,
hardened creeds of cementing stone,
prints of wounded feet gone on before.
ow, through the little window, by the stair
he stern pulpit, blood-red shines the sun
ough the deep nail-marks and the stricken side

Of that dear Shepherd of the souls of men,
Who gave His life, not for man's printed faiths,
But for sweet love of piteous human pain.
You read : ' No greater love hath man than this—
To give his best life gladly for his friend.'
And then, beneath the glory of God's Christ,
Simple and straight—a yeoman's humble name.

'Twas when the wild sweep of the wintry winds
Bore Northward through the glens the blinding snow
Into the Spring-time, and the shepherd's care
Drove from his bed the healing grace of sleep.
Fierce, like a foe returning to the camp
To ravish and to reave and rend and slay,
Came the dire blast of Winter back again,
Closing the passes, blotting out the skies,
Leaving the broad roads all obliterate,
And covering up the lone hill-tracks from sight
Of eyes familiar. Then arose the cry,—
'What of the flocks? They perish in the drifts!
The ewes, bewildered, flounder in the storm,
Finding the white death folded over all!'

O many a daring deed was then achieved.
Brave shepherds risked their lives upon the hills,
Where death's grim snares lay hid in drifting whirls.
Deep weariness, like soft snow, sealed the doors
Of sleep in Farmer Simpson's simple heart,

Till, from quiet dream's delights he stirred and
woke,

To hear a loud voice call him in the night,

'Rise,—for the flocks we love are perishing.

Wild is the snow, and wilder is the wind,

And, if we go not, all our sheep must die !'

It was the herd-boy's call,—the shepherd's house

Was far away above the blinding storm.

The farmer rose, and with a stumbling haste

Clothed himself, anxious for his hopes o'erwhelmed,

And round him cast his heavy winter plaid

Which many a night had bielded him from death.

Scarce, with their heads low bent against the gale,

Their way up through the desert place they pressed,

Till, cowering 'neath a black o'erhanging crag,

Or where a group of fir-trees broke the blast,

Or where the wind-blown wreath its crest up-curled,

They found the frightened flocks in huddling bands.

Hard through the heavy night their toil of love

They faced, until, within a sheltered dene,

They gathered into peace their precious care.

Then, 'Master, I am weary !' cried the lad,

And in the snow incontinent he fell,

That moment sealed in unawakening swoon.

His master, all outworn, yet right well knew

That through that sleep death's unreturning road

Led to the shadows. All his strength was gone ;
So down beside the lad himself he laid
And took him in his arms, enfolding close
The unconscious servant, lest death's cold embrace
Supplanted his ; and as the night grew keen,
Wrapt his own plaid about the faithful boy.
Then, soft as kisses, on his face the snow
Fell deep and silent. In the pallid dawn
The searchers, broken-hearted, found them thus,—
The servant breathing gently as a babe,
The master stark, a frozen bit of clay
His soul had grown too great for, in the mirk !

So men remember now, how sweet is love—
How, like the tender Shepherd of our souls,
It lifts even those the world wots nothing of,
To give their life, for love's sake, for a friend.

Love's Garden

IN moonlight of remembrance through the years
Beheld again in longing of the heart,
The quiet garden blooms where many a love,
Sweet as old ballad strains, was often told.

Guarded by hedgerows from the verdant lawn
It lay towards the sunshine and the stars,
A dream of beauty, deepened and enriched
By tenderest care of generations dead.

How oft on crumbling steps of the ivied stair
Which led down to that pleasaunce fair and old
We lingered ; and the honeysuckle blooms
Stretched forth inviting fingers to our own,
Breathing most gentle fragrance like a prayer.

There virgin lilies whispered to the rose
The purest exhalation of their soul
Through the long glorious days of radiant June.
A wondrous host, all clothed in snowy white,
Of rarest excellence most immaculate,
Like a procession of angelic lives,
Waiting awhile upon their homeward way,
They dreamed, spell-bound for stillness of the world.
There the encircling roses, deeply red,

As touched by blood of love's own longing heart,
With wonder stood around that stainless band.
And the tall foxgloves, children of the wild,
Tamed and enriched by nobler comradeships,
Yet carrying thither from the fairy dells
Glamour and witchery of a world apart,
And darkness of lone glades where midnight glooms
Are stirred by breeze-borne dreams which gird the
world,

Stood in quiet corners, moodily remote,—
A gipsy host, in charm of wildness drest.
How, when a cloud crept over the wan moon's face,
The pale flowers trembled, nearer leaned in fear,
Rustling together closer for the dark.

Oft would we sit in honeysuckle shades
When all was still, and to the soft guitar
Hum ancient tunes which in the Hebrides
Our grandames crooned above their sleeping babes ;
Or ring out valiant ballads of the deep
Our fathers sang, when flashed their fearless oar
Past echoing caves in sea-cliffs far away ;
Or, in the silence of close-crowding thoughts,
Recall remembrance of romantic times
When Arthur's knights rode out across the plains,
And starlight touched their spears to silver sheen—
Their hearts, each sacred as the Holy Grail,

Filled with rich wine of service for the weak,
Ready to live, or at one stroke to die,
To fetch the suffering succour and remede.

Or, under shadowy immemorial trees,
Where the clear moon along the grassy walks
Wove mystic meshwork's quivering witcheries,
We side by side dreamed o'er our youthful dreams.

O days and nights of magic power untold,
Immensurate,—how far ye lie to-day
From these steep stairs where Sorrow makes her
moan

Refusing to find comfort in her woe
For that Death's dark-browed angel has passed by,
Bearing away the inviolate draught of sleep,—
How far from streets where comrades Sin and
Pain

Walk bare-foot in the driving rain and wind,
Their hearts sad things of music out of tune,
Seeing no thorn-crowned Shadow walk with them,
Blinded until He touch their eyes to sight!
Then what a charm was ours to peep within
The unruffled waters of the old-world well,
Where the far stars seemed placidly asleep!
How many a maid had wondered, long ago,
To see her lover o'er her shoulder peer,
His face reflected past her startled face!

A garden sweet with dreams that do not die,
Whispering their meed of love's remembrances
'Mong the high branches of the sycamine,
And sun-smit beeches, and song-haunted limes,—
Memories of sweetness inexhaustible,
Beyond mere words' restricting syllables,
Spelt out by blood-beats, when the mood is on,
And th' unseen Artist plucks the heart's best chords,
Waking the soul's delight with sorrow's strain.

Thither the bride of young love's ardent day
Came, with her heart as radiant as the sun,—
The sweetest flower among the summer flowers !
Many the benison poured upon her name
From poor and sick who felt her gentle hands
Touch their hot brows to quiet unfretting calm,
Easing their tossing pain at the door of death,
Hushing their cries, as by a spell of heaven.

She walked in beauty in love's sweetest dream
Among the lilies, who now walks with God
In realms of bliss away beyond the stars.
Nor for long years. She heard the roses sigh
Around her window as she leaned abroad
In the soft twilight, when Night's shadow stooped
Low near the world to whisper God's own peace
Above the pain and turmoil of tired men.
Soon in her heart the shades of twilight sank ;

Weary her feet no longer climbed the stairs,
Till, in the dying summer's passing gleam,
She gave her loved the kiss of the long good-bye.
'Good-bye, beloved! Evermore, good-bye!
Good-bye, glad sunshine, garment of thy day!
O light of stars, that like love's water in my eyes,
Looked in mine eyes so often from the Vast,
Telling me secrets words could never tell,—
Waking my thought to dreams of worlds beyond,
Where the soul, freed from shadow, dwells in light
Soft as thine own, as measurelessly kind!
O great deep moon, that o'er my pain has poured
Thy shining sympathy for my dying heart,—
Till the day break before the angel's song,
With Christ returning, evermore good-bye!'
Then the pale hands were crossed above her
breast,
A fading lily's beauty in their fold;
And o'er her heart the little Book she loved,
Open at words most precious to her soul.
None except God and him who loved her most
Know the sweet message laid above the dust
That once was fairest 'mongst the fairest flowers
In that old garden's fairness long ago.
Now, in the snow-white cross, beneath her name
His deep remembrance still in tears o'erflows.

Read it.—‘Thou art all-beautiful, O my love !
There is no stain nor shadow upon thee.’

How oft when evening faded into night
He kneeled, and, weeping, kissed the dewy sod
Where daisies quickened o’er her quiet breast,
Whispering long ’mid his fast falling tears :
‘Sleep softly, till the morning. I shall come,
When the loud trumpet wakes me, to thy side,
And kiss thy dust to waking. Softly sleep !’
Yet far away he lies, his ashes true
To her grey ashes here beneath the grass.

Then knew the stricken what a stream of peace
Out of his stricken spirit flowed to theirs.
He moved from heart to heart ; and they grew
strong,

Fearing no longer Death’s most sober frown.
O wonder deep of human sympathy !
Not words can heal the heart most grimly scarred ;
Time heals not, but enriches Love’s deep wounds.
Silence is best. As one whom sorrow smote,
Crushing her soul as though in angry hate,
Setting her, blind for anguish, in her house
Left desolate as with Egyptian woe,
Said, ‘How can I forget his tender grace ?
His pity touched my heart, and all my tears
Sudden o’erflowed, and Faith took up their room.’

'What said he to thee?' all the neighbours asked.
 'Said?—he said nothing. Only took my hand,
 Where I was sitting, dry-eyed, by my hearth;
 And then we wept a little, side by side;
 And I was strong from contact with a grief
 As deep as mine, helped by a life whose wounds
 Had healing in them like the wounds of Christ!'

So in the garden, dreaming thus, the shades
 Moved 'mong the roses, lingered by our sides—
 Beautiful sadnesses that strengthened joy,
 And showed our souls the radiance past the tears.

God's Gentleman

DEAR were the people, grown most deeply wise
For that no crowds could shut them out from God
And the great world of thought that claimed their
souls ;

Yet one stands forth deep writ on memory's page.

I see him still—his threescore years and ten
Folding him like a garment—by his side
Her who had helped him bear life's varying load,
Sunshine when shadow veiled his soul in gloom,
And shade when aught confused his onward gaze ;
His comforter, a woman true and brave,
The noblest living thing that heaven has made.

A gentleman of God, who needed not
Heraldic tablatures to prove his blood
Ran clear from some high source austere and pure,
He still kept true the impulse of his birth ;
A man of sympathy, to no man slave,—
None better loved or trusted by his kind.

At kirk or market, on his quiet way,
His grey plaid o'er his shoulder, as he moved
Men gave glad greeting, proud to see his face,
Honouring honest worth, and faithful toil

Yet was he poor, as men do reckon wealth,
Though never a bank his treasure could contain,
Nor human fingers scribe it in one book.

Behind the hills he dwelt ; a little croft
His hands had wrung from grip of moorland bare,
Fighting incessantly ; for, while he slept,
Nature made raids upon him through the dark,
Striving to win once more her ancient rights,
And stir the waving weed where he had wooed
Fair Autumn's splendour of the yellow corn.

Not more resistless nor incessant strove
The stealthy Indian, creeping through the shade
Of forest vast, to clutch again his own
From conquest of the westward-moving plough,
Driving its furrow through primeval waste,
Following the broad axe of brave pioneers
Ringing a song of ever-widening worlds,
Than did that exiled spirit of the moors
Shut by the hand of labour from those fields.

In through the cottage door the jasmine peeped ;
The sweet-briar in the gloaming filled the air
Delightfully with fragrance ; and the rose
Dropt a red leaf upon the threshold-stone,
An offering meet for those who made her fair.
And underneath the hedge which loving hands
Had planted tenderly a quiet stream ran,

Singing, in sunlight, songs of gladness,
Telling the stars dream-stories as it passed
Betwixt deep shady banks, to blend its life
At length with that which, far-off, sought the sea.

There, in that room, when turf and clay had made
The walls wind-proof, and the rude beams of fir,
Fragrant of wild and haunted ways remote,
When thatched with heather, gave the mist and rain
And wintry drift defiance, they had made
Their home together. Love sat by the door
Singing sometimes, and sometimes brooding deep
Over life's mysteries. And when the Winter wild
Drove all within, Love entered to the hearth,
And in the brightness of the laughing blaze
Drew closer still their quiet companioning.
Then they were young. Youth like a full tide ran,
And laughed at grief and labour, pain and fear.

There, every day began with God's name writ
Above the lintel; and when eve crept down,
Bringing the stars to light men to their beds,
There, as one draws a door behind him close,
Shutting it fast against the risks of night
And evil things, they closed their door on care,
And barred it with God's name inviolably,
Then laid them down in stillness, fearing nought,
Nor caring where they waked, for well they knew

That where they oped their eyes they'd see His face
Whose scars have ever been toil's anodyne,
Badge of heaven's comradeship in life's hard ways.

Then came the children's laughter; little feet
Pattered about the floor, and in the sun
Wove the sweet spell of childhood's magic world.
Like sunny streams their lives flowed on a while
Together, ere they parted, not again
To laugh, as one, in sunshine or in shade.

One crossed the seas, to seek in other lands
Toil's greater recompense, and make a home
Where the vast prairie like an ocean lies
Towards the sunset. Often to the door
Came love's kind message, sent across the tide.
Sometimes a word or two, that times were hard;
Often a tender gift; and then, no more,—
Only the long lone silence, with no break;
At length the tidings that an Indian dart
Had struck the lamp which lit the life they loved.

And another, treasured, too, with pride,
For that he was so eager, tall, and fair,
Strengthened the hopes of these so faithful souls.
Yet, when his work was over, he began
To leave the fireside, wearied of the craft,
Went to the town, till on his father's name
He dragged disgrace, and to a neighbour's home

Shame that outcast a daughter from their hearth.
Then in the market, when the bagpipe's cry
Passed down the street, and war was wanting men,
He flung his fortunes 'mongst the marching feet,
And through 'he smoke of battle breathed his soul.
They said that he fought bravely, as he ought,—
His blood was brave as any ancient strain
That makes men straight their shoulders from the
stoop,

Lift up their heads, and charge with eyes aflame,
Remembering how the valiant fought of old.

His father spake not one impatient word.
'Thus is my pride rebuked!' was all he said.
'Have pity, Lord, on me, a sinful soul :
Help me to guard the dear ones in the fold,
Whom Thou hast given me!' was his evening prayer.

One fair sweet lamb was left them, a bright girl
Whose locks had borrowed from the sun its sheen,
Whose eyes had borrowed from the heavens their
blue,

Whose heart had borrowed from the snow its white ;
And her soft stainless purity their love
Clothed with their life. Through eighteen years
she grew

Pure as a prayer, within that humble home.
Then, as a fog that on a summer's day

Rises and steals across the sleeping sea,
Till stars are hid, and the moon's face is veiled,
And all earth's fairest beauty blotted quite,
So a strange stillness stole across her life ;
Her figure drooped, her feet crept wearily,
The music of her voice took sadness on
Behind its tones, and sunshine from her heart
Passed, till she spake to those she loved, no more.

A lily drooping by the meadow-side
Responsive not again to Nature's charm,
So for a while she was, till, as through mist,
They looked upon her face, and saw the gleam
Go from it, into darkness evermore.

He held himself from weeping ; he was strong,
Believing Faith should have no room for tears,
Living in shelter of the will of God.
'Tis little compliment to me,' he said,
'To see the good die young, while I am left
Creeping along these shadows into age !
How all the roses scatter their red leaves
Along the hedgerows ere the summer pass,
While hearts like mine, dry husks whence joy has
died,
Wait through the winds of winter, till the end !'

With lowly truth in soul-deep honour based
He knew his worth ; and not with measures crude,

But ever against eternal standards set,
He weighed the Seen beside the Invisible ;
Nor with one touch of mock humility—
The hypocrite's long gravecloth, which he wears
Thinking it is a garment full of praise,
Though to the eyes of angels and true men
'Tis written all about with awful truths
Around the soul it hides not but reveals
With deepening light. When fifty years the twain
Had faced life's journey, climbing heavenwards,
We met in the old barn, around a board
Of simplest hospitality. Some gifts
With kindly words we gave him—said we'd learned
To honour him, and her whose love had shared
The task of keeping life's hard highway straight.
He raised his hand and hushed us ; then, in tones
Charged with the dignity of tears withheld,
Said, 'Friends, for your kind thought and kinder
 gifts
We have no words, nor have we right or claim.
God has been kinder than our days deserved.'

Now they grew old and broken, bowed as though
The load they'd borne had bent them to its shape,
Earthward. She in her bed lay all the day,
Yet uncomplaining. He, beside the fire,

Recalled old times, lived in the years long dead,
Saw faces in the firelight, heard fond words
Long silent in the stillness of the tomb.

I sat beside him once, and understood :
'Where you sit now,' said he, 'I mind me well
Was where I flung our first big burden down
To build this dwelling,—stones from off the moor
Ungathered in my creel, when all around,
Far as your eyes can see, was heath and whin !'

Outside, the yellow corn's wide-rustling gold
Shone through the doorway ; and a lark's loud song
Told all the spheres how beauteous God had made
The listening world ; and in my heart I felt
I was with one who'd helped God in His task !

Now in the graveyard they have carved his date
On the grey stone that bears his father's name
And many another's of his ancient kin.
Stooped was he with his toiling, yet he walked
Erect with honour 'mong the angel bands
When he went through the lowly wicket gate.
God took a gentleman to serve in heaven
That morning when He called his spirit home.

God bless him and his kind, for earth has need
As much as heaven, for their work every day !

Speed the Plough

HERE, where pale Want and Sin with darkened
face

Creep through the grey streets ever wearily,
My soul recalls the woodland ways afar,
The track that countless feet of quick and dead
Have worn across the fields, and through the shade
Of whispering wind-wooded trees, until it reach
The moss-grown stile with lovers' names writ o'er.
There were we wont to wander when the sun,
His climbing journey ended, sought his rest
Behind the day's low margin-line of sleep.
There would we wait a while, and watch the fields,
Yellow towards the harvest, blush to gold ;
And the far hills on the horizon's edge
Deepen to purple, fading into night.
The river singing on his winding way
Would flash farewell before his glory died ;
While dreamlike gleamed a line of distant sea,
O'er which the dying sun his splendour trailed,
Seeking beyond the waves a world of dawn.

So dreaming, I behold, for city streets,
The teeming meads beneath the golden shield

Of the broad moon of happy harvest-tide ;
For feet of midnight folk my quick heart hears
The wind among the shallows by the marsh,
The bark of watch-dog by a sleeping farm ;
I stand alone in starlit fields and list
The rustling of the barley, as though moved
By breath of the Unseen, response to prayer
For daily bread to feed the empty needs
Of all the hungry townships of the world.

‘God speed the plough!’ is still a true heart’s cry.
For, let the broad share rust in fields forgot,
And death must sit by firesides everywhere,
And horror haunt the hollow gaunt-eyed year.
The shining circlet of the generous grain
Is love’s own girdle binding earth to God ;
And holy is the man who scatters hope
O’er furrows of the broad responsive fields.
More potent than a king—at his behest
The desert blossoms, and the bare hillside
Is draped with cloth of gold, while laugh and song
Stir the lone places, glad that God again
Makes a fair garden of our rugged world.

With open hand he flings the seed abroad,
Life’s potencies within it, all asleep,
Waiting till mystery move them. In her breast
Earth clasps it close, and with her own warm blood

She feeds it through the darkness till the morn
When her deep heart-beat wakes it. Many a blast
Sweeps o'er the furrows,—storm of blinding rains
Straight driven with level rage before the winds
That rush in madness round the rolling world ;
And the white snow that lingers by the door
Of Spring-time ; and the hissing charge of hail,
Beating the drums of battle overhead ;
And the grey mists that like a sheeted host
Of spectral watchers brood about the plain.
The keen pale frosty starlight's sleepless stare
Gazes wide-eyed, unblinking ; and the moon,
Wan wind-torn wisps of cloud about her brow,
With hasty foot climbs the high steeps of heaven.
These move about the seed's dull sleeping place,
Till lo ! the green blade seeks the genial air,
Through the deep dark upbursting into day.

Quiet to the open heavens lie the fields,
From stir remote, save for the timid things
That creep from out their covert in the gloom ;
Or lovers, whispering in the kindly shade
The time-old tale that makes earth young once more,
'Transfigured in the tenderest hues of morn,
While the still music of the heart's desire
Hushes the very winds to sympathy.
Day has a stillness too, that only breaks

When phantom Echo mocks the wild birds' song—
The cuckoo calling that the Spring has come,
The merle and mavis and the lark superne
Flooding the air with melodies of love,
Until the bearded grain has crowned the blade,
And rippling wave, like laughter, follows wave
Along the sun-chased pathway of the winds.
At last, the earnest of his hopes fulfilled,
Glad is the farmer as he walks abroad,
Beholding heaven's rich answer to his prayers.

The carnival of Autumn's ripened joy
Reigns in the fields supreme, and every care
Of days when clouds were with him, is forgot.
Yet oft the good man's heart was sore afraid,
As, looking forth into the chilly night,
He smelt the frost, and trembled lest the morn
Should see his best hopes black with touch of death :
Or when, week in week out, the dismal rain
Beat flat the corn, for sickle well-nigh ripe,
As though a trampling conflict had been waged
By angry foemen, through the gusty dark.

Great is the joy of harvest in the land.
Into the grain's ingathering all are pressed,
Youth and old age, and strength and weakness
come.

The children from their lesson-books are free ;

The neighbours' wives and daughters swell the
train ;

And strangers from beyond the environing hills
Come o'er the moorland ways to earn a fee
For winter's need in lone glens where they dwell.

Before the shining sickle falls the grain,
A gleam of gold athwart a flash of steel.
The merry bandsters, binding up the sheaves,
Come, singing ancient love songs, in their wake,—
Songs of forgotten swains who pined for love,
Nursing a hopeless passion in their hearts
That broke within them for some maiden's scorn ;
Or the long wail of woman's yearning woe
For that the brave who marched with music's cry
Fluttering above them like weird birds of war
Return not to the fireside or the fold,
Lying afar 'neath freezing stars unknown. . . .
How strangely near to Sorrow's house is song,
Where sad things spring from hearts that yet are
glad,

Having their gladness deepened by their grief
And by the sweetness of love's frequent pain !
Anon they sing of faith, and fearlessness,—
Brave things melodious made, that lighten toil,
And make even Poverty forget its load,
The irking chain it trails at each slow stride ;

Until the gladness of the field o'erflows
In laughter and in song that flood with mirth
The little world of work behind the hills.

The harvest gathered, and the stackyard filled,
The heavy toil gives place to lightsome joy.
The farm resounds with din of 'Harvest Home.'
In the great barn the piper screws his drones,
And shakes the roof with whirlwind blasts of reels,
There lads and lasses tread the merry dance,
Forgetting to be weary, heeding not
How the old clock of Time ticks out his texts
About the solemn years whose creeping tide
Bears all beyond the shallows to the deep.
Or the blind fiddler—led across the moors
And through the lanes, in gloaming, by his boy,
His instrument safe sheltered from the dews
In its close bag of frayed and faded green,—
Tightens his strings, and draws his rosin'd bow
Across the tremulant chords, ere he awakes
Jig, hornpipe, country dance, that stir the swains
To proud display of skill in heel and toe,
Shuffle and shake, till never a foot is still;
While the old greybeards crack their thumbs, and
beat
A stumbling time behind the screaming dance.
Then song and story give a breathing space,—

THE LAND OF MEMORY

Long tales of how the daughter of the king
Was won by him who battled in the marsh
And killed the dragon in his awful lair ;
Or how the caterans, dashing down the glen
Like cataracts from their mountains, slew the laird
Who strove to win again his captured kine ;
Songs that could never end, since each man knew
Ten other verses, while the chorus rung
So frequent that it lulled the old to sleep
Or stupefaction, like a cradle's rock.

Then mountainous dishes on the groaning board
Consumed with silence, closed the festive eve.

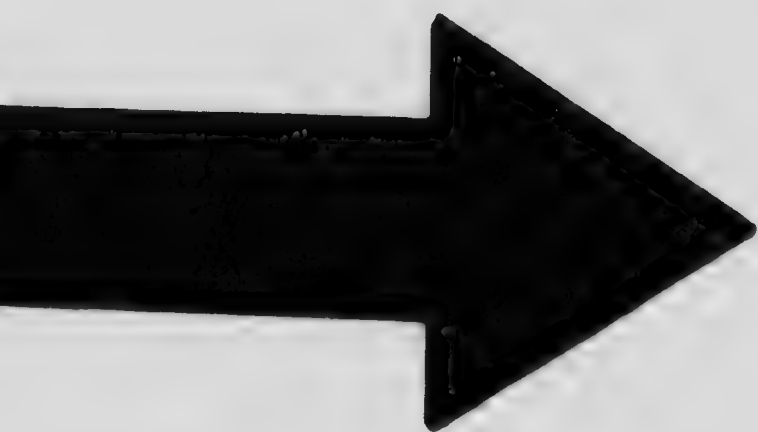
Next on that little world sank winter's hush.
The goodwife spun her wool, while by the fire
The young wove ropes to hold the thatch secure
Against the whirling blast of winter's rage ;
While in the barn the strong men swung the flail
Above the gathered treasure, and the wind
Bore off the empty chaff in eddying waves.

God keep the fearless hearts that sow the grain !
God speed the plough, that brings our children
bread !

The Sorrow

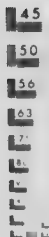
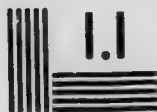
THE corn was yellowing to the harvest moon
When War's dire blast broke out across the glens.
By many tracks the great dark sorrow came,
Scattering the gladness out of all our days.
I heard a woman singing, far apart,
High on the hillside, driving cattle home,
As gloaming shadows trailed along the shore.
I scarce can think that many since that hour
Have heard a woman sing through that sad land ;
And few shall be the women who will sing
Ever again until our day shall end.
For the sad soul of Highland womanhood,
From which the tears are winnowed long ago
By lone winds blown from dim dream-haunted
 graves,
Follows the moon through battle-fields afar ;
And scarce a woman stooping low, to-day,
At binding of the sheaves in Highland fields,
But, when she rises, looks across the tide,
With hungry gaze, for a returning sail,
Bringing Love home to wave-swept Hebrides.
 The call crept into every straw-roofed cot ;





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It touched the fishers out upon the main,
It brought the boy in from the sun-kissed croft,
The father from beside his babe new-born,
The mourner red-eyed from the open grave.
It woke the sleepers with its urgent clutch,
That drew the heart-strings tighter, saying,
 ‘Come!’

They rose and gazed around the fields and seas
So dear to them, and went off through the cloud
So soon to fold with anguish all the earth.
Then came the cry of Lovat and Lochiel,
For men to follow them to Freedom’s fight . . .
How, when that cry went sounding, long ago,
Through the far glens, for sake of these old
 names

A thousand clansmen sprang across the heath,
Following the fluttering banners to the fray.
But ’tis a hundred years since Mammon swept
Those quiet places for the sheep and deer ;
And so, to-day, the weed waved on the dyke,
The nettles clustered by the broken door,
The browsing stag, unheeding, heard the cry ;
Yet wheresoe’er a man’s heart still abode,
Silently glad, it beat for Liberty.
Dire desolating change swept through the land.
The old folks, stunned awhile, sat by the fire,

Or gazed with frequent longing o'er the moor ;
Then crept out, dim-eyed, to the harvest field,
Stooping to their slow labour 'mong the stooks.

How few the years! And now there's scarce a home
But has one dead, remembered with a sigh ;
And for so many all the hopes of Youth
Are laid asleep, perchance without a grave,
In lands afar, beneath an alien sky,
No more to tread the mountain solitudes,
Or push the boat off from the starlit shores,
Or trail the net by moonlight on the seas.
Alas! the tired ones, yonder, in the rain,—
The grey hearts sitting by the dying fires,—
The little children wondering at the tears
Of grown-up people ; and pale lonely girls
Loverless, looking out across the deep . . .
Thus did War smite our homes among the hills.

We heard the secret marchings of the brave,
Under the dark, through villages asleep,
Past the unlighted windows,—autumn dust
Deep in the highways,—and through gloom of roads
That led by glades of woodlands, where the trees
Met thick above them as they quietly pressed
On to the wharves ; till, borne across the sea,
They found before them overwhelming hosts

That forced them slowly backwards, foot by foot,
Reluctant mile by mile, their bloody prints
Marking the way their thinning line retired ;
Till, up against the final barricade
Of stern resolve, their aching feet took hold
On sacrifice, and where they stood they died. . . .

Once, midway on the waters, as we went,
We met War's meaning sadly face to face,
When crept a ship of stars athwart our course,
Upon her side the blood-red Cross of Christ.
Slowly she bore her load of suffering men,
Upgathered from the Valley of Despair,
Home to the blessed islands which they loved.
No casual wayfarer whom one might meet
Without emotion or a welcome hail
Upon the midnight highways,—rather she
Was sister to Christ's mercy on the wave ;
Her pitying shadow kissed them as she passed,
And many a soldier blessed her as she sailed.

Then in the field, or in the bloody trench,
Beside the brave in Flanders, while earth shook
To hurtling battle-thunder's blinding death,—
Or, ere they went to die, and spoke of home
And hearts most dear, or when the silence drew
Between us, like a flood-tide full of thought

With reminiscent touch of sweet days dead,—
Or when near death's low verge by me they lay
Whispering soft words vibrant with power of tears—
Ah, love of Christ ! how War spake to me then !

In town and city of our misty North
It wrote its meaning deep on all folks' life.

I sat one day alone in a green place
And gazed across our grey metropolis
Crusted with memories of romantic years.
From ridge to ridge my dreaming eyes passed on
O'er 'battled towers that crowned the castled steep,
To the blue line which stretched in haze away,
Out where the sleepless ships have watched in
pride

The highways of the deep. How still it lay !
From unseen streets strains of a dying march
Of distant pipers, blown in stormy gusts,
Swept o'er the town,—old fearless battie tunes
That for so long have made brave trampling feet
Keep time together, hastening to the fray.
These passed ; and silence sank again o'er all,
Save for the children's broken laughter borne
Up from the echoing places where they played,
Young hearts forgetful of the fireside pain.

It was as though it slept in some strange spell

Which seemed to bring, in midst of that still day,
A glamour of grey sadness o'er the sun.
It stole across those ever-silent homes,
Their firesides lonely now for evermore ;
It touched the panes whence pale-faced women look
With eyes in which the light has faded, dead,
And hearts the same wound pierced that sudden
slew

The blue-eyed lad who was their joy and pride,—
Home upon home which treasured now the thought
Of sad remembrance of the only son
In whom went out long noble ancient lines.
So hung the sorrow over many a town,
In length and breadth of our old Scottish land.

In the quiet places, too, by Border streams,
Where corn was ripening for the reaper's hour,
The shadow trailed through village and through
field.

There stately woodlands clothe the river banks ;
And ancient homes of noted gallant names
Stand garmented with splendours of the past,
By sunny tracks where feet of stately men,
Whose glory lives on lips of History, trod
In days gone by. But now the blinds are drawn,
The homes forsaken, and the hearthstones cold.
The grass grows deep along the woodland ways :

The leaves fall thick, and, where they fall, they
lie.

The high roads stretch away o'er leagues of quiet
To hills of silence. For the men have gone,
Both rich and poor, together, overseas,
Returning not again to homes they loved.

Through sheen and shadow of the passing years,
The flush and fade of Scottish summer times,
They shall not see the valley that they loved,
The river ever precious to their souls,
The darling home of their deep hearts' desire.

Sometimes death's bitter arrow overleaped
The stretching seas to touch a cottage roof,
In quiet hamlet ; and the whispered name
Of the brave lad who fell, sank through the heart,
Heavy as stone. And there the mother sits,
And veils her tears, and rocks her to and fro,
Her apron o'er her face, in grief forlorn,
In voiceless longing for the sunny youth
Whose foot shall ne'er again draw near her door,
Nor word with laughter ever stir her heart.

And in lone glens among the sleeping hills,
So lately filled with wailing for the lambs
Snatched from the pasture stretching wide afar,
Sad women in the window set the lamp

Ere they remember how the hearts they love
Need it not now, nor ever more shall need,
To light them o'er the moorland to their home.

And yet again War's message spoke to me
Beyond the ocean, when I saw the sons
Of broad America, deep-chested, bronzed,
From prairie and from camp ; and, later, came
With them along our fathers' old sea-roads,
Climbing Atlantic ridges, night and day,
Eastward, for sacrifice, for the dear sake
Of Freedom, without which no man can live
And keep his manhood. Ever on they came ;
And shall again come so, till, finally,
The bells of Freedom ring around the world.

We wrote our compact in our best heart's blood ;
With cords of precious lives bound our resolve.
Wrong surely sleeps now in its grave in hell,
The stone of judgment sealed above its face,
Nor hope of resurrection shining there.
Whoso from that grave rolls away the stone,
'Twill grind him, without pity or remede,
To bloody dust before an outraged world,
Which, having suffered, ne'er forgets its wound.

Christ is Born

CLOSE down around me midnight folds her wings
Shutting the world to stillness ; while the moon
Moves 'mong the stars as pallid as a nun,
Scattering her light, like Love's beatitudes,
O'er rich and poor. Her beauty fills the heavens,
Shines o'er the lawn, and in the silent garth
Sets jewels twinkling in the frosted snow.

Still, though 'tis midnight, in the village near
The lamps are lit, and hearts remembering
Belov'd ones far away, in great grey towns,
Or in strange lands beyond the sundering seas,
Take thought that it is Christmas-tide once more,
The hallowed eve of Christmas, when the air
Seems quivering yet again in starry hope
To hear the cry of angels float across
The winding river, sleeping hill and field,
Waking the hamlets with the song of God,—
Remembering, too, some who have gone before
Over the shadow-threshold, into light,
Carrying their music with them into heaven.
Who knows but, in the crowd of singing saints,

Voices we love may ring across our night ! . . .
Keep my heart waking, Thou that never sleepest,—
Lest I should miss the dear familiar sound
That haunts my slumber, and my waking step
Guides as I move through long grey busy streets !

Oft-times I wonder if the angels keep
Remembrances in heaven, where years are not.
Do they remember still that wondrous hour
When the song rang through midnight's wide-swung
gates ?

Are they preparing now to sweep once more
Across the darkness of the world of sleep?
Do they sing still, as ever the night comes round,
Above our poor, tired, shadowy, wearied star?
Sure, my heart seems to tell me it is so !

With clash of bells, and pulsing throb of hymns,
The joy of Christmas girdles all the world.
Into quiet places where the fields lie still,
And far away, on the uncharted deep,
'Mid multitudinous music of the waves,
And through the forest silence, dim and lone,
The light of Bethlehem will softly steal
Like a bright angel, blessing longing hearts ;
And in great cities, where the tall spires watch
The living, and the dying, and the dead,—

In vast cathedrals, where the misty blaze
Of candles lights the kneeling multitudes
Swayed by the thought of Christ, as sways the breeze
The meadow grasses and the mountain pines,
The music of the soul's remembrance moves
With sob and sigh and swell that stir and break
Like voice of waters on a long low shore.
Here, too, it breaks, and cries along the hills,
Saying, ' Beloved,—wake ! God's Love is born ! '

Now, while I brood beside my midnight hearth
Whose flame upglances shyly in my face
And fills my room with shadows, all my heart
Goes out across the towns, to desert glades
Among the mountains, searching for the smoke
Of shepherd fires, where simple men await
The message of the new-born love of God.

Out o'er the stilly night the angels' song
Rang through the drowse of poor men far away,
As by the flickering flame they watched their flocks.
It woke the world from sorrow and despair,
And, as men turned from weariness, behold !
The skies swung open, and through heaven's high
door

Pealed loud the clash of singing, and of harps
Swept by the hands of angels, while the song
Told how God's highest glory and earth's peace

Lay sleeping in a poor Babe's gentle heart,
Low in a manger, in the oxen's stall
Of Bethlehem's crowded caravanserai ;
And in that Babe's deep slumber sleeps earth's woe.

This is the story old that stirs the world—
The birth-song of that little child who lay
Unknown save to the angels who revealed
The secret to those hill-men by their fire.

Outside, the frost is white upon the roofs,
And the wan stars are clear as shining eyes
In steadfast vigilance, all about our world.
The hills lie hushed in glamour towards the West,
The crystals of their folding robe of snow
All iridescent in the starry gleam.

I hear the old clock in the silent stair
Trembling towards the stroke of midnight ; soon
Hand will grip hand, and lip touch loving lip
With happy greetings of this holy time.
Alack ! that there be many who have none
To wish them Christmas hail, and so to-night
Just lay them down in tired beds in the dark,
With no expectancy of any voice
To wake them with the word that Christ is born ;
Or any hand to bear a kindly gift
Bright with the thought of this sweet time of love.
But, while I muse, upon my dreaming ear

Fall sudden strains of music drawing nigh,
I hear the gate thrown wide ; upon the lawn
A hurried group of rustic carollers
With flaring torches gather side by side.
The house is stirred, and every heart is moved
By the old strain, sung through each bygone age,
Calling all Christian folk to wake and sing
Glory to God because His Christ is born.

'Tis passing strange that yet, across the years,
Should come this voice to give men's sorrows pause,
To still the toiler's heart, to soothe the ache
That drives sleep from his bosom. Hark ! it tells
How deathless is the depth of love divine—
How pitiful is heaven's eternal God.

Out of our struggling fight for daily bread,
Out of our weary chase of dying things,
Out of the breaking sadness of our days,
Our love that passes from us through the night
No more returning with glad rhythmic feet,
We turn to that soft radiance in the East,
God's star of promise hung above the dawn,
And seek the cradle where Love's child is laid.
The dew is shining o'er His manger bed ;
The patient cattle look with great calm eyes
On Him for whom the angels veil their face ;
And all the quiring hosts of cherubim

Sing with a quieter wonder. As we gaze,
Lo ! like a globe of song that, through the gloom
Uprises, till it breaks in wide refrain,
All men and angels join in swelling praise
Of glory to the new-born King of worlds.

The palaces were shadowed, full of sleep ;
Lords of the earth were pillowed on their pride ;
The wise men wrapt in high philosophies,
Fallen in slumber deep beside their tomes,
When God found poor folk watching at their toil,
Faithful in trivial tasks ; and mystery
Fell out of heaven about their wakeful hearts.

God's love oft enters without warning knock,
Yet when He comes He finds His own awake,
And, when He goes, leaves song and joy behind.

O help us to be those, in lowly quiet
Doing our best, our hearts the open door
Through which shall float the angels' midnight
song,

That we may know the love-birth in our souls,
Light-bringing, life-uplifting, cleansing sin.

Where shall we make the bed of Christ to-day ?
Where strew a couch for God's own holy child ?
Lo ! in the deep core of our toiling life
The holiest place is waiting every hour.
Where the world's strife goes gravewards noisily,

There may pure spaces full of peace be made
For the sweet slumbers of the sleeping Babe.

All sorrows of poor women and sad men
Turn back at this sweet season, listeningly,
Lest they should miss the footsteps of the herds
Stumbling for gladness of the secret told
Their hearts upon the lone hillside afar,
When they beheld a vision of delight,
And heard the midnight blown apart with song.

It is all joy and sweetness now for them.
Light shines upon the lowly cattle-shed ;
And in that light I see the Man, sad-eyed,
The Galilean, with the wounded feet,
The thorn-marks on His brow, and in His side
The cruel spear-gash o'er His broken heart
Which on the cross gave out its life for me,
That in His wounds I might my sorrows lay,
And make my sins all snow-white through His
blood.

O God ! I am a fool to keep my life
Close-barred against the advent of His peace,—
To close mine eyes to the cleansing power of love,
Beholding not, in each day's pageantry,
The constant God,—in each heart's faithful wounds
The wounds of Christ, the light that long ago
Fell earthward o'er the Galilean glens.

Heaven is not gone from quiet places still,
Nor from quiet hearts that beat beside our own.
His love remembers. So, through changing years,
Earth and her pain are bound about His care
As though with golden bands ; and every day
Still nearer draws my wakeful pilgrimage,
Till, if my heart be lowly, I shall creep
Upon my knees through the unfolded gate,
And kiss the feet that, from the manger-bed,
Were pierced for me on their long Calvary.

Beloved, Christ is born ! Lift up your hearts.
Life is o'ermasteringly ours for evermore,
If we be true, knit closer every day
To man and God, in love's true service here.

Sing, carollers ! your torches on the lawn
No tears can quench, nor hush your roundelay !

s,



